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WE ARE SEVEN

In the townland of Doon in County Waterford live the Monaghans, a source of delight to themselves, but a blot in the eyes of the sterner inhabitants of the parish. Bridget Monaghan is the proud mother of seven, but the various men who should be filling the role of proud fathers are instead skulking nervously in the background, and even join forces in a plan to resettle the Monaghans. But they reckon without Mary, Tommy, Willie and Sissy (the twins), Pansy, Toughy and Pius—seven characters in search of a father!

Books by Una Troy

MOUNT PROSPECT
DEAD STAR'S LIGHT
WE ARE SEVEN

WE ARE SEVEN

by

UNA TROY



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FOR S. C.

I

“I met a lit-tul cottage girl,
She was eight years old, she said.
Her hair was thick with many a curl
That—that—”

PANSY MONAGHAN faltered.

“Clustered,” the Inspector prompted, kindly. “You know what that means, don’t you?”

Pansy opened her brown eyes at him as widely as she could. It was very wide. The Inspector passed his hand above his own somewhat inadequately covered head and then, realising that this was perhaps an unfortunate illustration, said, hastily: “Like *your* curls, my dear.”

Pansy’s down-swept lashes almost brushed her cheeks. She said, smiling (simpering, Miss Kelly thought, fiercely): “I’m eight, too.”

The occupants of the class-room drew an audible breath at this daring conversational approach to an Inspector. But the Inspector was returning the smile. He was fond of girls, big or small, and this was certainly a most appealing little creature.

“Wordsworth’s little girl and you have a lot in common.”

More than you know, Miss Kelly thought. She

regarded with great and unjust disfavour this pupil who, by any standard, was comporting herself admirably, beside putting the Inspector in a visible good humour.

“Sisters and brother, little maid,
How many may you be?”

A stupid poem, anyway, Miss Kelly mused. I never did like Wordsworth.

“How many? Seven in all, she said,
An’ wonderin’ looked at me.”

The moment of danger was passing . . . was past. . . . Miss Kelly sighed. Then another voice, gruff and abrupt where Pansy’s had been almost cloying in its sweetness, spoke from the Infant Class at the back of the school-room.

“That’s us,” it said.

The Inspector blinked. A very small boy had stepped forward from his companion Infants. He wore a red jersey and navy-blue dungarees dragged down from his shoulders by fists stuck tightly in the pockets. From a round, dirt-smeared face, a cold blue eye, under an upstanding yellow cock’s-comb of hair, transfixed the Inspector.

“That’s us,” the gruff voice said again. “Me an’ her.” The yellow cock’s-comb jerked nonchalantly at Pansy. “An’ the rest of us. Like those ones in that pome. We are seven.”

Miss Kelly said, helplessly: “Daniel!”

He glared at her.

“My name,” he told the Inspector coldly, “is ‘Toughy.

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Toughy Monaghan. *She* doesn't never call me Daniel, neither, only in front of you. Everyone calls me Toughy." He hitched up his dungarees with those invisible fists. A corner of his mouth turned down. He gave the impression of one restrained by pure politeness from spitting in a manly, juicy fashion. "That's because I'm tough," he said.

The Inspector said, "I'm sure you are." Man to man they regarded each other. "And how old are you?"

"Five." Toughy met Miss Kelly's stony stare. "Almost."

"I see. And so there are six more like you."

"Not like me," Toughy said, "but more. There's Mary. She's at home with mammy. She's done school. Mary's old, maybe sixty or seventy, I think. And Tommy. That's Tommy there!" He pulled out one fist and pointed at a stolid-faced boy of fourteen. "He's nearly done school. He's old, too. About the same as Mary."

"Toughy!" Miss Kelly began, but the Inspector murmured: "Please, Miss Kelly!" and Toughy continued unabashed.

"That's Willie an' Sissy!" The sticky forefinger indicated a boy and girl who blushed and shuffled awkward feet and hands. "They're twelve. I know that because they're twins and people are always asking their ages." He paused. "You'd count twins as two, wouldn't you?" he inquired anxiously.

"I would," said the Inspector.

"Then there's her! Pansy. An' *me*! An' the baby at home. He's awful young. He can't walk or talk. He's called Pius. After Popes. That's seven." Aggressively the cold blue eye dared the Inspector to reject his calculations. "I counted."

The Inspector said, admiringly: "What a lot of brothers and sisters you have!"

Pansy Monaghan's eyes were extremely wide and round now, but with emotion, not artifice. She looked at the dirty, scowling Toughy. She put one hand to her clustering curls; with the other she smoothed her neat, clean frock over her flat stomach. She said in a chilly, disdainful, tinkling voice: "He's not my brother. He's my half-brother."

Toughy gave an agonised howl.

"It counts, doesn't it? It counts?"

Miss Kelly said: "Be quiet, Toughy!" at the same time as the Inspector said. "Of course it counts." His voice was louder and had more authority. Mollified, Toughy Monaghan stepped back into the Infant ranks that opened to receive him. But Pansy's lower lip was quivering. The Inspector said, hastily: "Then Tommy is *your* brother, my dear?" and the solemn-faced boy looked at him gravely.

"No," Pansy said, in her small clear voice, "he's my half-brother too. And Toughy's. And the twins'."

The Inspector's brain was whirling. He glanced wildly at the five Monaghans assembled before him. He withdrew a few paces, Miss Kelly beside him. He murmured to her, desperately: "How many times was their mother married?" and with equal desperation she answered: "Never."

He blinked.

"You must tell me *all* about the Monaghans later, Miss Kelly."

The Inspector was new to that district. He drank five cups of tea (luckily Miss Kelly had the foresight to keep

the kettle on the boil so the pot was never empty) before he was fully informed of the story of Bridget Monaghan and her seven children. Inexorably he made Miss Kelly begin at the beginning, inexorably made her continue to the end.

The townland of Doon is situated midway between the little village of Ballybay on the lovely Waterford coast and the thriving inland village of Kilmuc, being three miles distant from either. It is a district of small farms of from twenty to one hundred acres inhabited by thrifty working farmers and their thrifty families.

“The only man in this countryside who never did a hand’s turn of work,” said Miss Kelly, musingly, “was Bridget Monaghan’s father. He had a cottage of his own, and ten acres with it. He let out the ten acres to grass and lived there with Bridget (the mother was dead) on a pension he had from the British Government. He’d sit in the patch of garden outside his house on a fine day amidst all the roses and flowers that his poor wife had planted and that kept on blooming, year by year, in spite of his neglect and, when it was wet or cold, he’d be inside by a roaring fire. Smoking his pipe. And talking. He’d talk the cross off an ass, if he got someone to listen. Mostly he did, too, because he was a fine speaker. Wars—he was through the 1914 war—politics, religion, anything at all he’d discuss and he had such a colourful turn of phrase that the oldest and dullest topics would seem bright and new with him. They said of him that his mouth was never empty of words, nor his pipe of tobacco.”

“A happy man,” the Inspector said.

“He was. He was looked down on, of course, for being so bone idle, but that didn’t worry him. Everyone said it was a shame to see Bridget growing up there with no

woman to care for her, but for all that she was a nice, neat girl. Gentle. Pretty, too. But a dreamer." Miss Kelly poked the fire and looked into the flamy core. "I remember her at the school here. She was mad for reading. History, poetry, anything at all. And afterwards, when she'd left school, you'd never see her with a book out of her hand. All love stories they were, silly, ridiculous stories, only she thought they were wonderful and true. She'd brood over them with a dreamy far-off look in her eyes. She lived in another world away from Doon and the cows to be milked and the butter to be made and the potatoes to be picked and all the rest of it, a world of romance."

"And I suppose what happened to her," said the Inspector, "was that she never came out of it."

Miss Kelly pushed back her grey hair from her forehead and looked straight at him with tired, kindly eyes.

"I think that's the truth. People blame Bridget Monaghan. Oh, it's right, of course; she is all they say; but there's more to it than that. They don't understand. It's because she never grew up. She still thinks every man is a knight in shining armour. And they're not," Miss Kelly said, sadly.

The Inspector said, gently: "I see." He was beginning to like Miss Kelly very much.

When Bridget Monaghan was sixteen she was apprenticed to a dress-maker in Waterford. Nothing was heard of her for the next three years. Then her father died suddenly and Bridget came back to the little house and the ten acres in Doon.

"She came back," Miss Kelly said, "with a baby—and no wedding-ring."

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"She must have been a brave girl."

"Brave? I don't know if that's the right word for it. It was more—unconcern, you know. Indifferent to the opinion of others, as her father was before her. There was plenty of talk, but not much to Bridget herself. She was so quiet and reserved and—" Miss Kelly hesitated. She smiled. "—lady-like, I suppose it would be called, that people never made too free with her."

If the Inspector thought the last phrase inappropriately worded, he said nothing.

"So she settled down in her cottage with her dress-making. She's a good dress-maker. Even still she gets plenty to do."

"People are more broad-minded nowadays."

"Broad-minded is one way of putting it. When Bridget made her mistake, times were different. Now there are many, far too many, mistakes around the countryside but not *so* many all *together*, if you follow me."

"One shouldn't," the Inspector said, "continue making the same mistake."

"No. Bridget did. Three years later there was Tommy, and then the twins, and then Pansy, and then Toughy. And then, when we had all hoped—well, six months ago, there was Pius."

"After the Popes," the Inspector murmured.

Miss Kelly laughed.

"Our parish priest was very angry about that. He was away at the time and there was a new curate in charge."

There was a question that puzzled the Inspector.

"In a district such as this, where it must be difficult to keep even one's most innocent business private, surely the Monaghan progenitors are well known?"

"That's the trouble," Miss Kelly said. "Everyone

knows. Not Mary's father. Some people say he was a sailor, others say he was a railway-porter. It has even been said that he was a lord; I suppose to make it more interesting. But as for the others——! It's most unfortunate but all Bridget Monaghan's children invariably take after their fathers in appearance."

The Inspector laughed outright.

"Oh, it's funny." Miss Kelly nodded her head at him. "In a way. But it's caused a lot of misery."

"Broken homes?"

"Homes don't break as easily as that here. But there's been unhappiness and heartache. It dies down, but—well, after four years' peace, along comes Pius and like everyone else in the parish," said Miss Kelly frankly, "I can't help wondering whom he's going to resemble as soon as he's old enough to resemble anything other than a full moon."

The Inspector laughed long and heartily this time. But Miss Kelly did not laugh. She made that weary gesture with her hair again, as if she were lifting a weight from her forehead.

"It's the children I worry about. They're grand children," she declared fiercely. "Even that affected Pansy, making eyes at you. *She* wants to be a film-star. And Mary is a nice girl. She's made to be a good wife to some good man, only I don't know who'd ever have Bridget Monaghan's daughter. Tommy will be leaving school next month. He has no interest in his books; his only interest is the land. Even now, in his spare time, he's done wonders tilling as much as he can of the ground around his house. And Toughy——" Her face lightened. "You know Toughy."

"It's a pity," the Inspector said, "that the woman

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doesn't move off somewhere else; somewhere she wouldn't be known. For the children's sake."

"Move? There have been plenty of attempts to move her but she won't budge. People have even suggested using compulsion but she can't be got out because she—she—"

"You mean she's an amateur?"

"She's never been known to ask for help from any of the men concerned. She's very independent." She paused. "It's said that when each child comes to the age of seven, she tells it who its father is and that's all she ever does about the matter."

"But from what you've told me," said the Inspector, "I take it by then the parentage is a well-authenticated fact."

"Indeed, yes. Even Toughy is a ridiculous miniature of his father already."

"Then it is easily understood," said the Inspector, handing his cup to be filled for the sixth time, "what tremors Pius is causing."

"Mammy," said Pansy, "we had an Inspector today." Bridget Monaghan smiled lovingly.

"Had you, pet? And how did you do?"

Toughy laid down his knife and fork and planted his elbows squarely on the table.

"I did very well," he said. •

"Him! He just talked. Mammy, he just talked and talked and—"

"I talked very well," said Toughy, calmly.

Pansy ignored him.

"I said poetry and he said I said it perfectly. And he said the twins' exercise books were terrible neat—"

"Terribly," her mother corrected, automatically.

"Terribly. Tommy didn't do much, though. Did you, Tommy?"

"No," Tommy said.

"He didn't know when King James was in Ireland."

"And when was he, pet?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm not supposed to know yet. But Tommy is. Aren't you, Tommy?"

Tommy did not answer. He was a boy of few words. He wasted none of them on King James, about whose career he was totally indifferent.

Mary said, firmly: "Now, children, if you're all finished your dinner I'll clear the table."

The children stood up. Pansy went to fetch her doll for an airing; Tommy got his spade from the little toolshed at the corner of the house; Toughy stuck his fists hard in his pockets and slouched away. Only the twins were left, waiting to start their lessons when the table was ready, and Bridget Monaghan and Mary at the small work-table by the window. Outside the window, Pius slept in his dilapidated pram.

Mary threaded the bobbin of the sewing-machine. She said, gently: "Don't you think you could stop for a little while now, Mother? You've been at this since morning."

"Yes, dear." Her mother stroked a fold of the material. "But Mrs. Simmon is calling for a fitting tomorrow." Doubtfully, she regarded the huge trailing pink and blue poppies on the yellow silk. "I could have had it ready before now only I really hadn't my heart in it, somehow." Bridget Monaghan was an artist in her trade. There were times when her fingers danced, so quick and keen they were, over her work; they could not dance over

stout Mrs. Simmon's poppies. She added hopefully: "But she likes it."

Mary began to gather the crockery from the table. It was cheap crockery but of one pattern and unchipped and the table cloth was carefully mended and clean except where Toughy had left his mark in gravy. Mary knew that families who ate their meals off the *Irish Press* or *Independent* sneered at the Monaghans for aping superior ways. She knew they were despised for what in others might have been admired, but in the Monaghans was adding insult to injury: the pretty comfortable cottage, seldom without a bowl of flowers from Tommy's garden; the meals, well-served, well-cooked even if the ingredients were sometimes poor and scanty enough to satisfy their bitterest enemies; the decent clothes, contrived by so many makeshifts, and, above all, for the good manners and way of speech that set them apart from their neighbours, they who were already set apart by so high a barrier.

Mary's face hardened into lines too deep and stern for her youth. She poured water into the bowl and watched, with her hands hanging idly, the grease slide from the plates. Each household task was commonly a joy with her. Her need and her vocation were for the making and tending of a home, but, though she loved her family with a fierce protective love, sometimes, as now, she was overwhelmed with a sense of unreality that made a mockery of all her domestic devotion and toil. To her simple mind a home signified, above all else, respectability, a factor sadly lacking in a household without either a head or a name.

Impatiently she shook her head and started to wash the dishes. Worrying like this.... Over nothing. Or,

if not over nothing, at least over very little. Only because Barney Higgins had caught hold of her in the lane last night and, when she pushed him off, had shouted after her: "What the hell are you so blasted particular about, anyway, you —!" Silly. Barney had a few drinks taken. He'd have grabbed any other girl the same way. (He wouldn't). He'd have shouted after any other girl the same way. Or maybe he would. (But not using the same words. Not using *that* word.) I won't think about it, she said, sensibly; there's too much else to think about.

Her mother. But you couldn't think about mother. You could only hope and pray and, really, when you remembered Pius, it didn't seem much use. But Tommy now. . . . To think of Tommy made her feel happy. A good boy, a grand boy. He'd be leaving school soon. He'd easily get a job; any farmer would be glad to take him. But she'd have to see he wasn't overworked simply because he was willing—and a Monaghan.

She looked at the twins, already studiously bent over their books. If they got their scholarships—and Miss Kelly said they would—they'd be going off to boarding-schools. They'd be all right there. Nobody would know anything about them. The priests and nuns were kind—often; they wouldn't tell—maybe. And afterwards they'd end up in the Civil Service, perhaps, with fine jobs. (But the scholarship money wouldn't quite pay the fees of even the cheapest schools. And uniforms . . . and books. . . .). It will be managed, she said, doggedly; it will. Somehow, when the time comes, she silently promised the twins, I'll manage.

Pansy. . . . No need to worry about her yet. She was contented enough now with her future dreams of fame and fortune. Pretty, foolish little Pansy, saving every

penny to send for autographed pictures of her adored film-stars, trying to imitate their hair-styles, dressing her doll in scraps left over from her own dresses, because, she said, it was fashionable for a doll to match its mistress. (But Pansy wouldn't always remain little, though she might remain pretty and foolish. And....)

Think of Toughy! Happy Toughy! Tough Toughy! (Oh, God please don't ever let anyone make Toughy unhappy! Don't let anyone call him ugly names! He thinks he's so wonderful. Oh, God, look after Toughy!)

Pius.... And thinking of Pius brought you back again where you didn't want to be. Only he's luckier than I am, she thought, with a sudden unusual bitterness; someday he'll know who his father is. I never will.

Bridget Monaghan had been most apologetic when she had explained that awkward fact to her daughter.

"It was a moonlight night," she said. She sighed. "The moonlight is wonderful on the river at Waterford. Of course, we really hadn't time to get to know each other. I forgot to ask his name." She sighed again, reminiscently. "But I do remember that he had a lovely accent."

Tommy straightened his back and wiped the sweat from his forehead. Then he bent to his digging again.

Brought you out in a right muck, this job did. Now, if a fellow had a tractor.... That would be all right. Sit up there at your ease. The potatoes were fair enough this year. Main crop mightn't be so good; you could never tell. If the weather didn't dry up soon, they'd go soft. And last year there was that spell of drought with the east wind skinning the ground. There was something in that book Miss Kelly had lent about beans. Good for

animal feeding, it said. No one grew them around here; maybe if a chap set a few rows, just to see. . . . Probably all nonsense, like most of the stuff in books.

The spade jarred on a stone. He cursed, but under his breath. Even out here, alone, he was conditioned by Mary's training.

Took everything it got, this bit of land did, and gave back as little as it could. A fellow was a fool to be breaking his back over it.

With the windy sky overhead and the earth turning rich and black at his feet, he grumbled happily on.

“*He was like us,*” Sissy whispered.

“Who?”

“William the Conqueror. Look!” She pushed the book across the table to Willie. “He was called William the—— what Mikie Brennan called you last week.” She glanced fearfully in Mary's direction, for it was also what Mary had said must not be repeated. “He hadn't a father either.”

“We have.”

“Oh, yes, but it doesn't count. Not really.”

Willie said, fervently: “I'm glad it doesn't. I don't like Mr. Bates very much.”

“No. He's rather foolish. And look, Willie!” She turned the pages rapidly. “There's another. The Duke of Monmouth. And another.”

“Is it all about those?”

“Yes. All famous ones. Earls and princes and dukes. And some plain ones who made themselves famous in other ways.”

“It didn't seem to matter to them, so,” Willie observed slowly.

"It doesn't matter if you can make yourself famous."

"Do you think we can?"

"I think so. Well, maybe not exactly famous, but important. Miss Kelly said there was a poor boy from Doon who became an American millionaire."

"Was it she gave you the book?"

"Yes. It's history, only more interesting. She said you could read it, too."

"I will when I have time."

Willie turned again to his arithmetic. He was slower, if more thorough, than Sissy, whose quota of sums for tomorrow was already completed. Sissy said, consolingly; "It isn't so bad doing lessons when you know you're doing them *for* something."

Willie grunted affirmatively. The twins relapsed into a companionable silence.

Pansy was sitting in the arbour with Jennifer. Jennifer's canvas face, which had never been beautiful, had been repainted several times, not too skilfully. But her pink dress was as smart as her owner's, and her rabbit-skin bootees splendid. Pansy was very bored with her. She carried Jennifer wherever she went, solely as a fashionable adjunct (as, afterwards, she was to bring a horrid miniature Pomeranian) but lately she had begun to wonder if Jennifer were even that. She pushed away the wretched, persistent doubt, because if you couldn't have a borzoi or a pet py—a special snake—you had to have something. So you had Jennifer. You were photographed with Jennifer. 'Pansy Monaghan now starring in . . . in "The Rose Tree" with her mascot, Jennifer. Pansy told our photographer that she is never parted from her favourite doll. "Of course," she said, "I have cupboards and cup-

boards full of dolls, but Jennifer is my oldest and dearest.”
She smiled winsomely.’

Pansy smiled winsomely. Then she looked up at the arbour and stopped smiling.

The arbour was getting less and less like an arbour every day. It had never been very much like one, even at the beginning. She’d shown it to Mary and Mary had said, vaguely: “What, dear?” And then: “Oh, that branch of hawthorn! Yes, isn’t it pretty?” Then the hawthorn branch had hung down in a graceful arch; now it just seemed to be growing all over the place. But if you hadn’t got a swimming-pool or a—a patio or a ranch, you had to have something. So you had an arbour.

Gingerly she wriggled out from under the flowering branch. The white petals clung to her hair, drifted from her dress as she stood upright.

“Yes,” she said, “I have always liked the old-fashioned blooms best.”

Disconsolately she kicked at the broken flowers scattered on the grass. She grabbed Jennifer by the leg and carried her, head hanging, to the gate. There she settled herself on the low pier, Jennifer held lovingly in her arms.

Because you never knew who might pass. Maybe a big film magnate in a big car. Maybe looking for the perfect child to play a special part. Or maybe just driving along and suddenly seeing the perfect child, and stopping. The car was long and shining, probably red, with a silver front. The magnate had a collar of black curly stuff, and a big cigar.

Patsy McGrath, passing with a load of manure on his rattling cart, shouted: “Hullo!” She said: “Hullo!”

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not seeing him at all, not hearing the creaking wheels, but looking beyond to the corner around which the red shining car would come, hearing the purr of the engine.

It was funny how hard it was to whistle. It looked easy enough when other people did it, but no matter how round you made your mouth, no matter how you blew, it came out like a breath and not like a whistle.

Toughy kicked a stone along the road before him and blew and blew out of a round mouth but never a whistle came. The stone glanced off his foot into the ditch.

A goal! Hurray! Hurray for Toughy Monaghan! He's scored the first goal in the big county match. Up Toughy Monaghan!

An old horse leaned his head over a gate to stare at Toughy. Toughy stopped. He climbed up the gate and scratched the white blaze on the horse's nose.

A wild horse. A stallion. Savage. But Toughy Monaghan could ride him. He could gentle him.

He climbed to the top bar of the gate and managed to scramble on to the animal's outstretched neck, facing towards the tail. It seemed a long way to that comfortable looking hollow in the back but Toughy worked his way onwards, inch by inch. When you got there you could turn around. Then you'd gallop across the field, you'd jump the hedge, you'd gallop on and on.

The horse, tired of this silly game, bent his head to graze. Toughy, suddenly lying on his back in the field with his legs in the air, gave one howl of rage and pain. Then he rounded his mouth and blew instead. He stood up and wiped his eyes with a dirty fist so that, encircled by mud, they gazed out on a dangerous world, bigger and bluer than ever.

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He trudged off, hands in pockets, shoulder ready to
butt an enemy and, in the next field, gloriously scattered
a herd of bullocks.

In his pram, the cause of much surmise, the focal point
of delightful slander, Pius slept on.

II

JAMESY CASEY was the meanest farmer in Doon and he owned the meanest farm. He worked it with the aid of one boy. It was heart-breaking land, with here a stony outcrop, there a dip to soggy marsh, and again fields whose crazy contours of ridge and hollow defied plough or reaper. Doon admitted that only Jamesy Casey could have made a living from those thirty wicked acres, where stones removed one year seemed to have seeded and reproduced themselves the next, where the bog drew moisture from the ditches dug to drain it, where no one field lay flat and decent as a field should lie. They said he managed it by toiling from early dawn to dusk, by existing on tea and bread and potatoes with hardly a bite of meat on Sundays, and by wearing clothes that a scarecrow would sneer at. A dog's life, they said, and felt it suited him well, for no one liked him, and all feared his sly glance and biting tongue.

His house was a mud cabin which he had roofed with tin once upon a time to save the expense of thatching. In that countryside of whitewashed homes, his stood out grey and dingy; good enough, he said, to give it a lick to keep the walls together and not go splashing on whitewash for show. Not a flower nor a bright bush grew by his door; that nonsense, he said, was right enough for women but not worth the waste of a man's time. Few

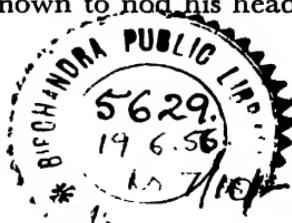
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had seen the inside of his home, but each boy of the moment agreed that it was furnished with two chairs, a table and a bed. Anything in the way of furniture needed beyond that, it was said, was composed of boxes. Butter boxes, orange boxes, any box he could beg from the grocer. One boy said tha. cocoa tins were used for cups, but that was doubted.

His one extravagance was his few pints at Hurley's of Kilmuc on a Saturday night. Here he would make his pint last twice as long as the next man's, sitting over it, talking over it, fiddling for some time with his emptied frothy glass before sadly re-ordering. He had even been known to drink round after round in a group and then slip away before it came to his own turn to stand.

He was fifty now, a tall spare stooped man, with greying, sandy hair, a tight mouth, and a foxy eye. He had only once been known to look at a woman, though, in that country where men are chary of matrimony and women of spinsterhood, there were women who would have welcomed the glance even of Jamesy Casey. But there was living evidence to prove that he had looked, too long and too much, on Tommy Monaghan's mother. Tommy's face was, strangely, the face of Jamesy Casey, so that occasionally someone looking on Tommy's cheerful grin and meeting his honest glance would wonder if perhaps Jamesy were really not as bad as he was painted and then, encountering Jamesy himself later and finding him so much the worse by contrast, would wonder how in the name of all that was holy he came to father such a son.

Jamesy had never attempted to deny his paternity. On the contrary, when the boy's name was mentioned in his presence, he had been known to nod his head and



say, gravely: "Aye! 'A fine lad, that, a fine, steady lad,'" with the gratified expression of one to whom all credit for Tommy's virtues was due.

He was thinking seriously of Tommy now as his latest boy stood facing him on the kitchen floor. The boy's face was red; he repeated stubbornly, for the third time: "I'm goin' at the end o' the week."

"Aye?" Jamesy regarded him speculatively. "Mind ye, I might manage an extra shillin'."

"I wants me full wage."

"Arrah, full wage how are ye! What about the drop o' milk I give ye to take home now an' again to the mammy?"

"Twice. Twice ye give me milk."

"An' the spuds? You can't say I didn't give ye a bag o' spuds the other day."

"Fit for pigs is all they was an' ye know it, too!"

"Aye? Well, we won't quarrel," Jamesy said, mildly, "but it's a pity all the same. You're a willing lad, I'll say that for you, and, mind ye, you're gettin' a good trainin' here."

"I wants me full wage."

"Arrah, how would a little scrap like yourself be earning a full wage!"

"The Government thinks I earn it."

Tensely Jamesy expressed his opinion of all Governmental interference.

When the day's work was done and the evening meal over, he locked up his house and strolled off in the direction of Monaghans'. The western sky was soft and gold; the east was bright with the reflection of the hidden sea. Soft light and clear light met and flowed around him and around the white hawthorn hedges and the powdery

dust of the country road and the young fresh grass. He kept his head down and walked on slowly, thinking. When he looked up and saw Tommy working in his little garden he smiled.

“Hullo!” he said.

Tommy said: “Hullo.”

Jamesy leaned his elbows on the gate.

“You’ll be leaving school any day now.”

“Yes.”

“You’ll be wanting a job then, I suppose?”

“Yes.”

“I might have an opening for you.” Tommy was silent. “I’ve heard good accounts of you.” Still Tommy was silent. “Well,” Jamesy said at last, “what about it?”

Tommy stuck his spade in the ground and leaned forward on the handle. Father and son were alike in attitude and impassivity as they confronted each other.

“It’s supposed to be a hard place, yours.”

“It could be. You’re not afraid of hard work, are you?”

“Not if there’s something to show for it.”

Jamesy said hastily: “You couldn’t be expecting too much at first and you only learning.”

“I wasn’t thinking of money. Though that’s important, too.”

“Right enough it is, but we must all start in a small way.”

“Yours is bad land,” Tommy said bluntly.

“Ah, good or bad, ‘tis the same amount of work a boy would have to do on it.”

“It could be made better.” Tommy rubbed the palm of his hand along the spade. He frowned. “Those marshy fields—if they got a new lay-out of drainage——”

“Ah, it’s no use. I’ve spent a fortune on them.”

"You haven't. There's a system with piping——"

'Piping! In the name of God, boy, where do you think I'd rise the cost of that?"

"You'd have ten times the money back in a few years. And that three-acre field by the cross—I'd let that lie fallow for a year," said Tommy thoughtfully, "and then, with proper manuring and a good top-dressing——"

Speechlessly Jamesy gazed at him.

"I'm not asking you to *run* my farm for me," he said at last. "Not yet."

"And sheep on the hollow field," said Tommy.

Mary Monaghan came from the house. She stopped when she saw Jamesy. She said: "Good evening!"

"Evening to you," he said. He shifted his elbows on the gate. "Tommy and I were discussing a bit of business here. There's a job going on my place."

She came a little nearer. She did not invite him inside the gate nor did he expect to be invited. Both knew it would have been highly indelicate in the circumstances.

"It wouldn't suit Tommy," she said.

"Why not?"

"You pay poor wages."

"*Small* wages," he corrected. "Maybe I do. For a start. It's my way. For a start."

"For how long?"

"It all depends on the boy himself."

"Tommy is a good boy."

"None better," Jamesy declared heartily. "Don't I know it! But he's young. You can't say he's not young." Mary said nothing. "We could try for a few weeks," Jamesy said. He mentioned a figure. Mary looked at him. "For a few weeks," he said quickly. "Until we see how he gets on."

"I don't think it would be suitable," she said. She glanced from Tommy to his father and her face was still and cold. "It wouldn't be suitable at any wage."

Jamesy broke a twig from a branch by the gate and put it between his teeth.

"That," he said, "depends on how you look at it." He rolled the twig between his teeth, chewing ruminatively at every pause. "Lately thoughts have been coming to me now and again that never bothered me before. Maybe it's the years beginning to tell on me. There's times I stop and I say to myself: What are you slaving away for, Jamesy Casey, day in, day out, trying to hold your few acres together, you without kith or kin to carry on after you?" Mary's mouth was a thin bitter line but Jamesy stared musingly beyond her into distance. "No kith or kin," he murmured. "In a way." There was a long pause. His gaze focussed meaningfully on Tommy. "So I was thinking it might be a good thing to have Tommy working with me on the farm." His foxy eyes met Mary's chill grey ones and then slid sideways again. "You wouldn't want to stand in his light?" he said softly.

"It's late in the day you're getting these ideas," Mary said, with a queer, harsh ugliness distorting her gentle voice.

"Better late than never, they say."

"There's no man would trust you, Jamesy Casey, further than he could throw you."

"I'm not asking you to trust me. And I'm making no promises either. But we understand each other, don't we, Mary Monaghan?"

She did not answer. But when he spoke to Tommy she remained silent and that was all he wanted of her.

"Well, what about it, Tommy?"

"I dunno."

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"We could try how we get on." He frowned. "Mind you, if there could be a way of draining that marsh—"

"There is," Tommy said eagerly. "You see, if you go with the lie of the land and—"

"Yes. We'll see what we can do." He spat out the battered pulp of the twig. "It's a strange thing you mentioning that three-acre field awhile back. I've been considering that field."

"Two years would put the heart back in it. If you—"

"Aye. We'll see what can be done about that, too." He took his elbows from the gate. "You'll be along to me, so, when you're done with that trash of books?"

"All right."

"Aye. Good luck to ye, then. Good luck, Mary."

"Goodbye."

Jamesy Casey walked off. His mouth and his eyes were narrowed in a smile; he hummed tunelessly as he walked along. He was well contented with his evening's bargain. He had the prospects of a cheap, willing boy for a fair while now. Maybe for a year. Maybe even for two. He wouldn't count on longer than that because you couldn't hope to fool people for ever.

A simple poor cejit that lad was, with his talk of drains and sheep and the rest. But sure what else could he be, with the simple poor eejit of a mother he had?

Mrs. William Bates had had six children in eight years of marriage. She was not an unreasonable woman. For the multiplicity of her offspring she did not at all blame her husband; for their peculiar addiction to arriving in Noah's ark formation she most bitterly did. Any woman could have six children; only William Bates's wife could have conceived three sets of twins.

She had said comparatively little when the first pair arrived. She had merely pointed out to him that it was obvious that twins ran in his family. They were unknown in hers. She had pointed it out to him frequently but she had not enlarged on the subject. But with the advent of the second pair, she became almost hysterical. A woman, she said, should have had more sense than to marry William Bates with Willie and Sissy Monaghan a living object lesson to show her what she might expect. Everyone, she said, was laughing at her. When anyone looked at the Bates twins, you could see they were thinking of the Monaghan twins. You could see them trying to hide their grins. Some didn't even bother to hide them. William managed to soothe her at last with the gift of a fur coat, an undreamed of luxury for the wife of a Kilmuc grocer. But, though this calmed her somewhat, she wore the coat not as a flag of truce, but as a flaunting banner of war, and she did not become less voluble.

William was made to be a happy little man. His soul yearned for a cosy domesticity, for a fond wife and healthy children. All this was the end for which he had laboured; all this he had thought within his grasp. But now, with his small shop prospering daily, with a wife who was an excellent mother and house-keeper, with the fruit of his loins testifying to his manly prowess, his once serene contentment was nothing but a desolation. For a third set of twins was yelling upstairs and Mrs. Bates had become a devil.

William stood beside the big brass bed, looking piteously at his wife. Propped with pillows, she sat there, looking at him, red-faced and angry. And, red-faced and angry, the new twins howled on either side.

“My dear—” William said and stopped. It was the

first opportunity for speech that Mrs. Bates, from sheer breathlessness, had afforded him within the past quarter of an hour and now he found himself unable to avail himself of it. Excuse or explanations were, he dolefully reflected, useless; you couldn't explain away the twins.

"I won't stand it," Mrs. Bates said.

William shuffled his feet on the floor.

"They're very nice babies. Lovely babies," he added, hopefully.

"That has nothing whatever to do with it."

"But it's nice that they're nice, isn't it? Very nice."

Mrs. Bates said: "Don't be a fool!"

There was silence except for the hungry, wailing twins. William stood and shuffled. At length, unable to bear the tension, he spoke.

"They—they cry rather a lot, don't they?"

"Why wouldn't they cry?" Mrs. Bates demanded fiercely. "Tell me that! Why wouldn't they cry?"

William insanely did not recognise this for the rhetorical question it was.

"Wind?" he suggested.

His wife's face swelled with rage before his horrified eyes. She bounced in the bed. She laid a protective hand on each miserable twin.

"Well might they cry," she said, "well might they cry for the shame that lies before them!" William was silent. If he felt that the twins could hardly, as yet, be aware of any slur on their honour, he wisely did not say so. "Growing up," Mrs. Bates declared wildly, "to be the butt and the joke of every corner-boy in Kilmuc! The fourth set of twins belonging to Mr. William Bates, if you please! Half brother and sister to the children of that—that—that—."

William said wretchedly: "I *told* you how it happened. I've told you over and over again. Whisky never suited me and—"

"If the same happened to every man in Ireland that whisky didn't suit, the country wouldn't hold the population. But I won't stand it," Mrs. Bates declared, "I won't stand it."

"But, my dear, it was so long ago. Before I met you, you know."

"Something will have to be done."

"But it's rather late now to do anything. Besides, my dear, I really *don't* see—"

"That woman and her tribe must be cleared out of the place. It should have been done long since."

"But, my dear, I don't see—"

"If you say you don't see again, I'll go mad!" Mrs. Bates sat upright, stiff and quivering. "I won't have my children growing up related to those—those—. I won't have them encountering those—those Monaghans wherever they walk. That family must be got away from here."

"But, my dear, I—"

William paused in time.

"I don't care how it is done," Mrs. Bates said. "But done it must be." Her voice dropped sepulchrally. "And until it is done, William Bates, all is over between us!"

"What do you mean, my dear?" William asked fearfully.

"I mean exactly what I say. How do I know it would stop at twins next time? How do I know it wouldn't be triplets—or four—or five?" Her voice rose hysterically. "Me with rows of babies lying around me and the papers writing about me, and pictures?"

William was very frightened now.

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"You mustn't upset yourself; it isn't good for you. And you know, my dear, by the law of averages——"

"The law of averages doesn't apply to *you*, William Bates."

"But it must sometime, it really must." He backed away from the bed. "Anyway I'll do my best."

"Those Monaghans must be cleared out, William, and that's my final word."

"Yes, my dear," said William and escaped.

Matthew Hogan was the proprietor of the only newsagent's shop in Kilmuc. It was a small shop, set in an angle at the junction of the two streets of the village, but quite big enough to cater for the needs of the reading public. One shelved corner was the local centre of the County Lending Library and here it was Matthew's delight to preside in a praiseworthy effort to direct and improve the general cultural standard while his sister, Johanna, attended to the other more lucrative, but less demanding, business.

Matthew was a contented bachelor; Johanna cared for him admirably and caused none of the worry that might be feared from a wife. As befitting his calling, he was known to be a learned man, ready, on any encouragement, to discourse with knowledge and conviction on whatever subject that might offer for his consideration. He was generally listened to with much respect; if his reputation were founded on the manner of his speech, rather than its content, it was none the less secure. He commanded an extensive vocabulary of phrases, some of them Latin or it might be even Greek, all of them unfamiliar to his hearers; when he uttered these esotericisms in his slow weighty voice, with one hand gesticulating at

you, and the other constantly adjusting the pince-nez on his high-bridged nose, with his rounded shoulders hunched forward towards you and his long thin face and narrow grey head nodding above them, you felt that here was the very essence of wisdom.

As he grew older (he was now close on sixty) he withdrew, year by year, from the crudities of the modern age into the charms of a vanished past. His garments became more old fashioned; he affected the suggestion of a stock. He began to take snuff, forming the habit purely for the sake of its eighteenth-century ceremonial. Claret was beyond his means but, on a Saturday night at Hurley's, he drank his stout from a tankard kept specially for him and always referred to it as ale.

He held a position of peculiar social eminence in the village, being regarded as on a cultural peak of his own. Only once had his status been threatened and even now he could shudder at the recollection of the guffaws of laughter that had swept the district when his divergence from fastidious austerity was made obvious.

Even Johanna had failed him then.

"How could you?" she said. "You and Bridget Monaghan! Oh, Matthew, how *could* you?"

He couldn't explain his fall to her; he couldn't even explain it to himself. "*Errare humanum est*," he said. "*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*," and, of course, she had no answer to that.

Time heals all things and it healed at length the bruise on Matthew's proud spirit. Nine years now covered the memory of that regrettable lapse. He had never seen the unfortunate result of it and only on the rare occasions when his liver was out of order did any faint recollection rise to trouble him.

On this bright morning in May he felt particularly well. The sun shone on the street; he hummed creakingly as he glanced out from the shady recess of the shop where no ray ever penetrated. This week's *Dungarvan Observer* carried an article of his on the Comeragh mountains; he had read it over and over again all through breakfast. It would certainly come under discussion at Hurley's tonight. As he arranged books on the shelves, he repeated to himself some of the finer phrases. 'Many a crystal stream comes laughing through the clear air. Curlews call above the bogs within whose bosom lies the lonely lake like some lost jewel. . . . Larks rise to greet their Maker. . . .' And then, '*Rusticus expectat dum defluat amnis.*' That last had come in nicely and naturally.

A little girl entered the shop. Matthew did not like children. They were mostly rough and disrespectful, demonstrating sadly the modern lack of parental control. But this one seemed at least quiet and clean. She wore a pink dress and she cradled a pink doll lovingly in her arms.

"Well, child?" he inquired mildly.

The little girl stood silently looking at him. A dull child. Matthew said more sharply, "Well, child, what do you want? Miss Hogan will give you your newspaper. Or do you want a book for your mother?"

The little girl said: "No, thank you," and continued to stare. Johanna was staring at him too. And now she was staring at the little girl. Matthew said crossly: "If you don't want anything, run away then!" and turned to his books. But Johanna said: "Oh, *Matthew!*" in an odd voice and the little girl kept on standing there. She said, in a small, shaky voice: "I do want something."

Matthew turned from her in exasperation.

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"Will you find out what this child needs!" he told Johanna. He spoke quite sharply for Johanna was standing stupidly behind the counter, with her mouth hanging open in a most unbecoming fashion.

The little girl's eyes grew big and round. She blinked several times. A scanty tear swelled in each huge eye and trickled out damply.

"I want my father," she said.

"The child is lost!" Matthew pivoted fussily. "Will you run down, Johanna, to the Guards? I'll mind the shop."

But Johanna did not move. And the child said horribly: "Don't you know me—dadda?"

A shudder crept along Matthew's spine. The long, literary hair stiffened on his neck. He said hoarsely: "What?"

"Don't you know me, dadda? I'm Pansy Monaghan."

Pansy felt aggrieved. He should have known her. They always did. It was the call of the blood, or something. He seemed a very silly old man.

Johanna was shaking all over.

"Oh, Matthew," she said, "I knew it. I knew it the minute I saw her. She's exactly like you."

The little girl had curly hair, pink cheeks and round eyes and mouth.

"Good God, woman," Matthew said, "don't be ridiculous!"

Again the round brown eyes filled with tears. But this time the tears were too small to fall. Pansy blinked hard but to no effect.

"Oh, dadda," she said pathetically, "aren't you glad to see me?"

Mrs. Dent and Dick Brown appeared in the doorway for their newspapers. Matthew grabbed this dreadful

child's outstretched pleading hand, pulled her into the kitchen and banged the door behind him.

"Now," he said, "who sent you here?"

The scene was going badly but Pansy tried hard to raise it to its proper level.

"I thought you'd like to see me, dadda. I thought you might be lonely for me."

No one could have appeared less lonely than Matthew as he towered, sweating, above his daughter. Pansy lifted her eyes to his and hastily lowered them again. She whispered: "I'm so tired." Her small shoulders drooped; the doll hung limply from one weak hand.

Joanna came in. She said: "Dick is looking after the shop for me. I think I might be able to manage this better than you, Matthew." Briskly she addressed Pansy. "Sit down, child! Now tell us what brought you here!"

Pansy pointed the lolling doll at Matthew.

"To find him. Dadda."

"Tell the child to stop calling me that absurd name!" Matthew shouted.

Johanna regarded him coldly.

"Is it so absurd, Matthew?" She turned again to Pansy. "And now that you've found him, what do you want?"

Pansy clasped her hands together.

"Oh, dadda, can't we all be happy together again as we used to be? Just the three of us. Mammy—mamma, I mean—cries every night. Her heart is breaking."

Matthew recoiled in speechless horror.

"Her cheeks are growing pale. She gets thinner every day." Jennifer fell unheeded from Pansy's lap to the floor. "She sits by the window waiting, waiting. . . ."

Pansy hesitated, wondering whether to add a third 'waiting'. She decided against it. "She never tells me what she's waiting for, but I know. She's waiting for you. Soon, if you don't come, she . . . she . . ." Pansy glanced at Jennifer and drew inspiration from the sight of her spreadeagled form. "She'll be lying cold and dead."

Matthew was still unable to speak. His eyes bulged, his neck moved convulsively. Johanna said calmly: "You must be tired after your journey, Pansy. You live in Doon, don't you?"

"Yes. Miles away. But I had to come."

"Three miles is a long walk for a little girl."

"Yes." A neighbour's bicycle, borrowed without permission, was propped outside against the kerb. "I think my feet are bleeding."

Johanna glanced at Pansy's sound shoes and neat white socks. Her mouth twisted. She said gravely: "I don't see any blood."

"You couldn't see it. But they feel bleeding. They *are* bleeding."

"I'm sure you'd like a glass of milk and some biscuits."

"Sweet biscuits?"

"Chocolate biscuits."

"I like chocolate biscuits *very* much." She watched Johanna fill a glass of milk from the jug on the dresser. "Who are you?" She nodded at Matthew. "Are you his wife?"

"I'm his sister."

"Oh!" Pansy pondered, digging Jennifer in the ribs with a dusty shoe. "You're my auntie, so," she said suddenly and smiled.

Matthew exclaimed: "Good God!" but Johanna,

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brushing past him with the biscuit tin said, urgently: "Be quiet, Matthew!"

"I should call you auntie, shouldn't I?"

"You can call me Miss Hogan."

"Why?"

"Because it is my name."

Pansy felt some lack of logic here but she was too engrossed in the biscuits to argue it. She said: "How many can I have?"

"As many as you wish."

"I could eat a lot. I'm hungry," Pansy said, wistfully.

"You would be, after your walk."

"It's not my walk." The milk and biscuits had diverted Pansy's attention from her art but now she threw her whole soul into it again. "I'm always hungry. So is mammy—mamma." Her lower lip drooped quiveringly at Matthew. "We're very poor. We haven't any money to buy food."

Matthew was suddenly galvanised into action. He strode over to Pansy. He pulled a pound note from his pocket and tossed it into her lap.

"There!" he said, "There! That's what you were sent for, isn't it? Will you go away now?"

"You're a fool, Matthew," Johanna said.

Awed, Pansy stared at the money so carelessly offered her. Mary had forbidden the children ever to accept presents of money but Mary was far away. Pansy could not calculate how many films, film magazines, sweets and lemonade this wealth represented; it was beyond dreams. She took up the pound note reverently, folded it and put it in the small embroidered pocket of her dress. She looked admiringly at Matthew. For the first time

she realised his desirability as a parent; she, at least, was beginning to feel the call of the blood. She said: "You must be very rich." A glorious thought occurred to her. "I suppose I'm your heir?"

"Go back to the shop, Matthew," Johanna said, "and leave us alone. And try to remember what you've so often said to me."

"What?"

"*Macte animo!*" said Johanna.

Johanna went out that evening and did not return until ten o'clock. She found a despondent Matthew sitting over the embers in the kitchen range. She hustled around with paper and kindling and not until the kettle was boiled and the tea arranged on the table at Matthew's elbow, did she sit opposite him and tell him what business had kept her so long away.

"I was at the Monaghans'," she said.

"Ah!" He smiled weakly. "It was good of you, Johanna, very good of you. But I realise it's no use. They mean to bleed me white." The cup and saucer rattled in his agitated hand. "But they won't," he said violently. "I won't have it. What can they do, anyway! Tell me that! What can they do!"

"Nothing, of course," said Johanna, "and they don't want to. Please be careful, Matthew! You've spilled some tea in your saucer. I met the eldest girl, Mary. A nice sensible girl," said Johanna, approvingly, "a steady girl. She was most annoyed to hear what Pansy had done. Apparently a film that Pansy saw here in Kilmuc last week contained some scenes of reconciliation between a father and his small daughter. This child was instrumental in bringing a family together. Pansy was obsessed by the notion of herself in the role of the

young heroine, whom, I gather, she much admired. But I'm afraid she considered you badly miscast as the father."

Matthew groaned.

"It's no laughing matter, Johanna."

"No, Matthew? Don't you think it has a faintly humorous side?"

"I do not."

"Perhaps you wouldn't. Pansy, however was really touched by your little gift; I gathered that it had considerably endeared you to her. She expressed the hope of meeting you soon again."

"I won't have it, Johanna! I tell you I won't have it!"

"You won't, Matthew. Mary was firm. She forbade Pansy ever to come to Kilmuc unaccompanied." Johanna paused. "I'm not quite sure that Pansy is really an obedient child."

"She's a horrible child."

"Matthew, she's your daughter."

"I can't help that." He caught Johanna's eye and stuttered. "I've told you again and again it was all Bridget Monaghan's doing."

"Biologically speaking, she must be a most unusual woman." Johanna gave a short prim cough. "Mary was very annoyed indeed when she heard of the pound note. She told Pansy to hand it back immediately. Unfortunately, Pansy said that she had lost it and to prove this showed us the hole in her pocket. I myself had seen her busily enlarging this hole with her fingers." Again Johanna sighed. "I fear the child is a dreadful liar."

"What else could you expect?" Matthew demanded fiercely.

Johanna gave him an odd look.

"As you say, Matthew, what else could you expect?" She stood up to remove the tray. "You needn't worry any more about the whole affair. It was only a child's nonsense."

Johanna was usually right in her opinions, but she could hardly be blamed for having under-estimated Pansy. Many had done so.

When, the next day, an envelope containing two ten shilling notes was handed in to Matthew, he felt that the distasteful episode could now safely be forgotten. Obviously that child in pink had molested him without the connivance of her family. He was grateful to Johanna for her share in setting his mind at ease; he did not express his gratitude in words, for that was not his way, but he kindly read aloud to her, in his mellifluous voice, his entire article on the Comeragh mountains.

(The contents of the envelope saddened Johanna. She knew it was hardly earned and ill spared. She admired the pride that had gathered the money together and hoped, fervently, that that little—she designated Pansy correctly, if impolitely—would glut herself sick on the proceeds of her hidden store).

A week later, Matthew had relegated his daughter to the limbo which, as far as he was concerned, she had occupied since her unlucky birth. Once more he felt that *omnia bona bonis*. Two weeks later, as he walked through the village, courteously exchanging salutations with his neighbours, she appeared by his side. She was in blue this time and carried a blue doll. She said, sweetly: "Good-morning, dadda."

For one moment, Matthew stood, riveted to the ground and then, ignoring her, he hurried on with his long stride.

She came pattering after him. She said, again, a little louder: "Good-morning, dadda."

He stopped. He could not have her calling after him here in the public thoroughfare. He turned a terrible face on her. He said, through his teeth: "How dare you follow me! Didn't your sister tell you to keep away from me?"

"Yes, dadda."

"Don't call me that name! Then why don't you do what your sister tells you?"

"She's only my sister but you're my father."

"I'm *not* your father."

"Mammy—mamma—said you were."

Matthew said, wildly: "Well, *I'm* telling you to keep away from me too."

Pansy said nothing. She had early learned the usefulness of silence in the absence of convincing argument.

"You'll be punished," Matthew said, viciously. He looked around helplessly. Could no one rid him of this pestilent child? "I'll get the Guards. You'll be taken to prison."

Pansy appeared blandly unimpressed.

"Your sister will punish you."

Pansy admitted the probability.

"But not very much," she said.

"Yes, she will. She'll give you the worst beating you've ever got in your life."

"She can't. I get hysterical," Pansy explained, "so I can't be punished much. They have to be careful. I'm very sensitive, you see," she added, proudly.

Already people were pausing in little groups on the street. Matthew saw, in a house opposite, a hand pull a window curtain slightly to one side. He shuddered. He said, bluntly: "What do you want?"

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Pansy could be blunt, too, when there was no need for finesse. She said: "I'm hungry."

"You're not hungry."

"I am. Not for ordinary things," Pansy said, "but for things like those."

They were standing in front of William Bates's grocery store. Pansy indicated a dish of sugared cakes in the window.

"I gave you money last time."

"I've spent it."

Even in the height of his misery, Matthew was shocked afresh by this new evidence of the child's depravity.

"You couldn't have spent a whole pound already."

"I did. Things are dear." She paused, and then said, in a raised voice: "Dadda."

"If I give you money, will you go away?"

"Yes."

"Will you stop calling me dadda?"

"Yes."

Matthew handed her three shillings. Pansy was a child of her word when she lost nothing by it. She said, politely: "Thank you, Mr. Hogan," and left him for the cakes.

After that, life was a jungle. Matthew never knew when a child with a doll would suddenly spring beside him, fixing him with misted brown eyes and speaking of her stomach. For a time he gave up altogether leaving the shelter of his house during daylight but even that availed him nothing. After some weeks of freedom from his incubus, Pansy and Jennifer, in white, appeared on the pavement outside the shop. Pansy made no attempt to enter; she simply stood there, with sad, limpid gaze directed towards the interior.

Matthew was motionless, his jaw hanging, transfixed by that basilisk stare. He heard Johanna asking in concern if he were ill but he could not answer. He raised a trembling hand and pointed. Johanna peered through the window.

"Um!" she said. "I'll settle her!"

"No, no!" Matthew leaped for the doorway. He could not allow the depths of his degradation to be revealed to Johanna. "I'll manage, Johanna."

Glowering down on Pansy, it was all he could do to restrain himself from striking her. He said, through clenched teeth: "If you come near my house, I will give you nothing. Nothing, do you understand?"

Pansy pointed out reasonably that for some time past she had found it impossible to make contact with him anywhere else.

"If I meet you on the street, I may give you something. But not more than once a fortnight."

Pansy had long been able to discern from family experience when the exploited had reached the limits of endurance. She said: "All right." She hesitated. "Will you give me money today? To start?"

He could not do that. Johanna was watching.

"No."

"All right." Pansy hesitated again. "Dadda."

"And if you ever call me that name, you'll get no more from me."

"All right," Pansy said, for the third time, and went off along the street, slightly disappointed. There was cream chocolate in Bates' at only twopence a bar. He could have given her twopence, anyway. As a matter of fact, she had counted on at least six bars. However, she realised that her period of penury was only temporary

and the future promised a steady income to a wise child.

Matthew lay awake all through that night, sweating in an agony of impotent rage. It was absurd that anyone should be blackmailed by a child. It was grotesque. It was farcical. It was also, alas! true.

He fell asleep by dawn and dreamed that Pansy sat upon his bed while, horribly, Jennifer's painted mouth opened and called him dadda.

When Jim Power married Ellen McGrath, it was that rarity amongst the farming community, a love match. Jim had a fine farm of one hundred acres and a big sound house; the match-makers were busy on his behalf. But he would listen to none of their suggestions; he went himself and asked old McGrath for Ellen. It was said that he made no haggling about her dowry either and, as McGrath was never a man to fling away good money without cause, she brought to Jim not a penny more than a bare fifty pounds. However, there was no denying she was the prettiest girl in the parish and Jim seemed satisfied with his bargain.

As it turned out, though, she wasn't such a good bargain after all; ten years had gone by since the day she and Jim had stood side by side in Doon chapel and there was no child in the old thatched farmhouse. And Ellen Power had altered; she was quiet and silent where she used to be singing like a lark with happiness, and the light was gone from her smile. People said the change started around the time when it became plain for anyone with eyes in his head who Toughy Monaghan's father was. They were sorry for Ellen but they were sorry for Jim, too. It was hard on a man when the only son he had was one he couldn't lawfully call his own.

That day Ellen had come to her new home with Jim, she had been afraid of her happiness. She needn't have worried. It didn't last long.

After a year she became uneasy. At the end of the second year she went to Dublin. They told her there that she could never have a child.

Jim was very gentle with her. "It doesn't matter," he said, again and again. "We have each other. That's all we want."

But she could not believe that was all he wanted. He needed children, as all men do; children to make his home a family place and to carry on his name and his work after him. Almost he persuaded her but there was still that little nagging germ of doubt at her heart. When old Delia Cunningham, the worst gossip in the countryside, came in one day and, beginning with malicious insinuation, went on to forthright statement, that doubt was justified.

When Jim returned from the fields in the evening she said, without greeting: "Delia Cunningham was here today."

"That old——!" He laughed uneasily. "I wish she'd keep her tongue out of this house."

"Maybe you do." She wanted to hurt him, she who until now would have died sooner than have him suffer the slightest pain. He had caused her pain so deep that her whole body was sick with it. "She told me the Monaghan child—the one they call Toughy—is remarkably like his father." He was silent. "I haven't seen him," she said, "but I suppose it's true."

He muttered: "How should I know? I never saw him either."

"Surely you're the one who ought to know." She

smiled a queer, twisted smile. "Isn't it strange that I'm the last person in the parish to know you have a son?"

He said her name hoarsely and took a step towards her. She held out her hand to ward him off.

"Don't touch me!"

He stood with his arms hanging.

"Ellen! I'm sorry. I hoped you'd never know."

"Wasn't that a lot to hope for? They say the Monaghan children always take after the fathers."

He said, again: "I'm sorry."

"It's I who should be sorry. It must be hard to be tied to a barren wife, Jim."

"God damn it!" he shouted. "Can't we talk like human beings?"

"I'm afraid I don't know how human beings should talk in these circumstances. I'm only saying what I feel."

"Well, *feel*, damn you! Don't stand there like a lump of wood! Tell me what I am! I know what I am." His guilty rage crumbled. He said, miserably: "Ellen, forgive me! You know I love you. This thing that happened was only a madness."

"I think it was very sensible. It proves that you're a real man. You could have plenty of fine children if you had another wife. Everyone can be sure now where the lack lies in us."

"Ellen!" he said, "You don't think—you don't think—" But she said nothing, only smiled that mirthless smile. "It wasn't altogether my fault. That time you came back from Dublin, you—you—" He paused. She said, politely: "Yes?"

"You kept on crying."

"I remember. You were very sympathetic."

"I *was* sympathetic but—Blast it, what do you think I married you for? For yourself, because I loved you. Not for a breeder. But, after Dublin, you wouldn't be natural. And that night we quarrelled—you were crying—you drove me crazy. I went out."

"I remember."

"That's when it happened. I was mad. It meant nothing. You know it meant nothing. I've told you a thousand times I don't care if we never have a child. It's you who keep talking about them, not I."

She said: "Will you have two eggs for your tea?"

During the following months he made many more attempts to plead with her. She would listen, answering nothing, and then, when he was silent, would go about her household tasks. He shouted at her; he cursed her; she heard him in the same detached manner. Once he struck her; she made no movement to defend herself and he stumbled, sobbing, from the house. She was always polite to him; she never touched him save by accident. In the big double bed at night, she kept her body apart from his with her white, cold face hidden from him.

After a time he sullenly accepted their life as she had moulded it. She was satisfied. At thirty-three there was no trace left in her of the pretty light-hearted bride of ten years since; she was a staid, handsome woman, respected by all, friendly with none. Her husband was known as a hard man, but honest.

On this May evening, Jim Power strolled out with his pipe and his dog after supper to inspect the new bull. As he walked by the headland of the Big Field where the corn was green he could see the bull standing peacefully in the centre of the Paddock Field beyond. A moment

later he saw a small boy begin to climb the bars of the strong iron gate that led from the road to the Paddock Field. He shouted but either he was too far away to be heard or the child did not heed, for he put one leg unsteadily over the top bar and started to climb down. Jim Power shouted again and then he ran, calling to his dog.

The child was standing in the Paddock Field now. The bull had raised his head. The child held a small branch in one hand. He advanced purposefully towards the bull holding out the other hand. The bull's massive head and body swung around slowly to face the intruder.

Jim Power's sweating grip tightened on his blackthorn. His feet, ruthlessly tramping the corn in a direct line to the nearest point in the wall between the two fields, were snared and hindered by the clayey soil. His staring eyes were fixed on the small figure still advancing on the motionless, waiting bull. Then he heard the sound he had been dreading, that dull boom like a distant mutter of thunder rising quickly to a roar, saw the bull, head lowered, move forward suddenly with all the incredible gathered speed in the huge, unwieldy body, saw the child check, falter, run back towards the gate and in the same instant heard a snarling bark mingle with that sickening reverberating bellow and saw his dog leap for the bull's flanks, saw the bull stumble and face around clumsily to this new enemy.

Jim Power was across the field, he had the child by the arm and, as the bull, bewildered, maddened, savage with rage, turned again and charged at him with Rough hanging from one ear, he was over the gate, dragging the child with him and calling his dog to safety.

The three of them crept along the ditch while on the

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other side of the wall the bull pawed the ground and snorted and roared.

The small boy whispered: "Why do we have to go like this?"

"Because if he saw us he might break down the gate to get at us."

"Could he?"

"If he really wanted to, he might."

They spoke no more until they were sufficiently far away from the bull, whose roars were becoming philosophically lessened, to stand upright. Then Jim said, grimly, looking down on the tousled figure in dungarees that stood, with feet planted wide apart, before him: "I hope your father gives you the worst whipping of your life for this."

The small boy said: "I haven't a father." He knelt down beside Rough. "Look!" he said. "Blood!" His lower lip stuck out and quivered.

Jim passed his hand over the dog.

"He's all right. Only scratched."

"He's a *good* dog," the small boy said. He felt in the pocket of his dungarees. "I'll give him my apple."

"He doesn't eat apples. You'd better take yourself off home. And maybe this will teach you not to go into a field with a bull again, you little fool!"

"I only wanted to pat his head. I thought he might let me if I gave him my apple." The small boy said, aggrievedly: "He didn't even seem to *see* the apple. He's a very stupid bull."

"I wouldn't make a habit of patting bulls on the head." They were trudging along, side by side, with Rough dragging himself painfully at their heels. "Even at your age, you ought to have more sense."

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"I have a *lot* of sense, but I'm tough. That's why I do things like that, because I'm tough. I chase bullocks."

"The bull chased you," Jim reminded him, unkindly.

"Yes." The small boy frowned and stuck his hands in his pockets. "He chased you, too." He asked, anxiously: "It isn't 'xactly a disgrace to be chased by a *bull*, is it?"

"It's always a disgrace to annoy a bull. That's not tough—just plain silly."

"Oh!" the child said, flatly. He pursed his lips and blew. Then he spat. "Of course, I'm a bit young yet. I couldn't be expected to know everything."

Jim glanced down. On an impulse he said to this creature whose neck he could have wrung not so long before: "You'd better come to my house and get a wash before you go home. And we might find you a bite to eat."

"I don't like washing but I'd like to go to your house. I like seeing other people's houses. Where do you live?"

Jim pointed across the fields to the farmhouse.

"That's a nice house. I don't know the houses around here. I haven't been this way before."

"Where do you come from?"

"From along the road. A long way along."

"You're small to be out on your own."

"Yes. But I'm tough."

Jim stopped abruptly.

"What's your name!"

"Toughy," the small boy said, proudly.

"Toughy what?"

"Toughy Monaghan."

Jim stared at his son. He dug his hand in his pocket and pulled out a shilling. He said, harshly: "Here! Take this and be off!"

"But I'm going to your house."

"Clear off, now! And don't come around this part of the country again or I'll set Rough on you. That's what I do to boys who interfere with my animals."

Toughy said, brokenly: "I didn't *mean* to make your bull cross. I thought he'd *enjoy* the apple. I thought he'd *enjoy* being patted."

"Clear off to hell! And don't let me see you around here again!"

Toughy rounded his mouth and blew. The ensuing sound was the nearest thing to a whistle he had yet achieved. He said, with a nonchalant attempt at indifference: "All right. But if I was a farmer, I wouldn't *keep* a dangerous bull. And I don't want your money. We're not allowed to take money." He turned away and then turned back again with a fierce blue glare. "Even if we were allowed to, I wouldn't have it. I'd rather have my apple."

Jim Power stood looking after him until he was out of sight.

Meanwhile Pius thrived under the avid speculating gaze of the public. And still he resembled nothing but a cheerful moon.

III

IT was Mrs. Bates who initiated the activity. Despite all her threats, despite all his protests, William either had no intention of doing anything regarding the elimination of his superfluous twins or he did not know what to do. Mrs. Bates knew what to do. She began to talk.

Bates's Store was the most popular shopping centre of the district. Here, every Friday, many of the Doon women came to make their weekly purchases. Hitherto Mrs. Bates, busied with household cares, had seldom appeared in the shop, leaving the conduct of business entirely to William and his assistant. Now she was very frequently behind the counter, and always on a Friday. And she talked. She talked to the women of Doon. She had innumerable little friendly chats over tea and sugar and biscuits and, whether these intimate gossips began with the state of the weather or the family health, they invariably led to the Monaghans.

Mrs. Bates sympathised with the women of Doon. She was truly sorry for them. It was dreadful for them to have such a plague spot in their midst. It was making the name of Doon infamous. People wondered what kind of Christians were in Doon that could tolerate such a crying scandal, the like of which wouldn't be found in the length and breadth of Ireland, no, nor anywhere else, for, that matter. And, apart from the shame of having

such neighbours amongst them, the Monaghan household must be a constant source of worry to the decent Doon women. Because, although of course you could depend your life on Mick or Harry or Joe (her hearers would nod fervent affirmation of faith in their male kin) still there was no denying that men were men. (And here the heads would nod, sadly, but even more emphatically.)

And then there was Pius. Until now, at least you knew where you were, but with Pius you didn't know—yet.

Mrs. Bates knew where to stop. She always stopped at Pius. She sent away many a Doon woman to brood, to peep over the hedge at Pius fattening in his pram and to wonder if that nose had anything familiar about it—or that chin—or that rolling eye. . . .

Soon her many conversations became fruitful. She no longer had to introduce the subject of the Monaghans herself; it was constantly being offered to her. She had merely to enlarge on it, to return it tastefully garnished with Pius.

At last she judged the time opportune to call a little meeting. It was done quite informally one wet Friday—merely a word to picked customers to come upstairs for a warm by the sitting-room fire—but when her guests found themselves sitting in a circle, with glasses of Ruby Port in their hands, they knew they were there for a serious purpose and not for pleasure.

They waited for their hostess to speak. She came straight to the point.

“Now that we happen to be here together,” she said, boldly investing her contrivance with a fortuitous aspect, “there’s a matter we should discuss, however unpleasant it may be: a matter you’ve all spoken to me about at

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one time or another in the shop.” She paused. She drew a deep breath. “The Monaghans!”

The circle stirred in anticipation. But Mrs. Bates had no intention of allowing any profitless salacity. Without delay she defined the terms of discussion.

“How are we to get rid of the Monaghans?”

Everyone looked at her. No one spoke. Then Mrs. Dempsy said, feebly: “If they could have been got rid of, it would have been done long ago.”

Mrs. Bates regarded them scornfully.

“Whatever has been done to remove them? Only talk!”

It was suggested that the quality of that should have been sufficient to drive any self-respecting family from the parish. Mrs. Bates pointed out that the whole trouble with the Monaghans was that they weren’t self-respecting.

“There’s only one man to move them,” she said, “and that’s Father Healy.”

Mrs. Quinlan objected that Father Healy had been parish priest for the past ten years and he had done nothing but talk either. And lately he had even seemed to give that up as a bad job.

“He must be requested to *order* them from the district. By some of his leading parishioners.” Mrs. Bates surveyed them as a general his troops. “By *you*!”

It took much persuasion to convince them of the essential rightness of her plan of campaign but at last, partly by flattery, partly by adroit use of Pius, she succeeded.

Mrs. Dempsy said, resignedly: “You’ll be our spokeswoman, of course.”

Mrs. Bates’s face was a stern mask of grief.

“I couldn’t do that. It wouldn’t look well. It might be thought that I had a personal interest in the matter.”

The circle accorded her a mute sympathy, fervently hoping, meanwhile, that the rapidly thriving Pius would involve none of them in a similar disqualification.

Father Healy was somewhat astonished when the deputation was ushered into his study the following afternoon. They seemed oddly tongue-tied and ill-at-ease. He cracked a few of his celebrated jokes but even these did not lessen the tension. Finally he looked forcefully at Mrs. Dempsy who, having coughed several times and once opened her mouth and closed it again, had made the nearest attempt at eloquence.

"Yes, Mrs. Dempsy? Yes?"

She gulped.

"The Monaghans."

Father Healy frowned. The Monaghans were a horrible blot on an otherwise fair-to-average parish. They had made him the butt of much clerical levity. They were his cross. He accepted them as such but it was difficult for a man to carry a burden that insisted on increasing. Rapidly he calculated the age of Pius, wondering wildly if Bridget Monaghan had done it again. No, at least it couldn't be *that*.

Suddenly all the women became voluble together and told him. Still frowning he listened until the last incoherent gabbles had trailed off into silence.

"H'm," he said. "H'm." This exclamation had served him well in his calling. It had the merit of conveying much and saying nothing. By a long drawn out h'mm it gave ample room for consideration on awkward occasions. The h'mm became like the buzzing of a bee while Father Healy wondered why suddenly, after all these scandalous years, these women were so peremptory in demanding the immediate eviction of Bridget Monaghan.

Then he remembered Pius. "H'm," he said again. He regarded the five wives of five respectable parishioners. He sighed. This might be a lamentable demonstration of lack of marital trust but he could not reprove it. He could only, as he always did and as no doubt each single one of these women was now doing in her own particular case, hope for the best. "I'm afraid," he said, "I can't order Bridget Monaghan from the parish. Even if I could, you know, I don't see what good it would do. She'd go to someone else's parish. That would hardly be fair of me, would it?"

Mrs. Dempsy said, grimly: "We wouldn't care whose parish she'd go to as long as she wasn't in this one."

'Neither would I, indeed,' Father Healy thought, and recollected several of his more jocose brethren upon whom it would be a pleasure to unload her.

He said: "I would be overjoyed if this" (he judged it opportune to make some concession to the emotions of his audience) "this running sore were removed from my beloved parish." He paused. They waited expectantly. "You can imagine what a source of worry and grief it has been to me." He paused again and again they waited, encouraged by his pulpit manner. "Had it been possible, you know I would have spared no effort."

A murmur of voices rose together and then one said, clearly, above the rest: "We think you should name Bridget Monaghan from the altar."

"Oh, dear me!" Denunciation from the altar was the final and most powerful weapon a pastor held over his flock in these effete days. Father Healy was very distressed. While recognising the validity of their motives, he was troubled by the zest of these Christian women in hounding down their weaker sister. They looked, at the

moment, as if they might cheerfully hound him down, too. He wondered if it would be well to storm at them, to roar them from the room in a burst of pastoral rage at their impertinence in daring to dictate to him the conduct of his business but decided that suavity was less trouble now and in its final results. He said, reasonably: "Bridget Monaghan was named from the altar by my predecessor, I believe. It had no effect."

Nothing ever had any effect on Bridget Monaghan, he reflected wearily, remembering long hours of spiritual wrestling with that gentle, lady-like woman. She was always so humble in her repentance, so sincere in her abjuration of future error, that eternal fire faded quickly to an incongruous absurdity in her meek presence. And no one was more astonished than the sinner herself when she transgressed again.

The women stared at him despondently. Someone said: "We don't like having our children mixing with those Monaghan children at school," and someone else said, tearfully: "It's not *nice*."

Father Healy reflected that in some circumstances, it might certainly be embarrassing. He looked sympathetic. Secretly he preferred the Monaghan children to any of his other lambs; they were an interesting and amusing family. It was indeed a merciful dispensation that only the Creator could know the heart of man. His expression of sympathy deepened.

Thankfully he saw that they were preparing to leave. He went with them to the door, with many benign and vague assurances. He thanked them for their visit.

"It is a great pleasure and comfort to me to know that my parishioners have the welfare of the parish so much to heart. But these are difficult cases—*ve-ry* difficult

cases. All I can do is—pray.” He shook hands gravely.
“All you can do is—pray.”

Never had lack of faith in prayer been so clearly evinced as by the faces of these good women. Father Healy allowed himself a glass of sherry on his return to his study.

Mrs. Bates was disappointed but she was not despondent. She was restrained in her comment. The priesthood, she said, wasn’t what it used to be. That was a fact and you couldn’t get away from it.

Mrs. Dempsey agreed.

“I remember in the old days when I was a girl, Father Brown used to go around the ditches with his blackthorn in fine weather. He’d have the boys and girls scattering like rabbits.”

There was a general sigh for the good old days.

“They’d put a curse on you in those times, if you went against them. Your cattle would perish.”

“And the butter wouldn’t churn.”

Mrs. Quinlan had been told by her grandmother of a man whose feet turned into hooves because he wouldn’t go to Mass, but this was considered far-fetched. But everyone sighed again when Mrs. Bates spoke of Father Brown’s sermons.

“I can see him now, hopping up and down in the pulpit, with his face getting redder and redder until you’d think he was going to fall before your eyes in a fit.”

“Ah, he was always worth listening to.”

“Do you remember the lovely way he’d talk of death and worms and the flames of Hell?”

They remembered. But Mrs. Bates said: “Mind you, I’m not saying a word against Father Healy. He’s a

grand man—in his own way. It's not his fault if maybe that way isn't the same as another's." There was a charitable murmur of understanding and compassion. Mrs. Bates waited until it died away. Then she said, briskly: "We must consider what our next move should be."

No one else had thought of any future move being possible. They waited with admiration for what this indomitable woman might suggest.

"There's William's cousin," she said.

William's cousin was the Sergeant in Kilmuc. Mention of him brought with it the chill implications of the mighty force of law. Wide-eyed, they stared at Mrs. Bates.

"I was thinking of the children," she said. "The poor children!"

Her voice was laden with infinite sorrow. They regarded her doubtfully. No one had hitherto felt any sympathy for the Monaghan children; they were a fine, healthy, brazen lot. But Mrs. Bates's eyes were shadowed with a womanly sadness.

Mrs. Dempsey asked, cautiously: "What's wrong with them?"

"Oh, Kate, how *can* you ask what's wrong with them? Why, their home is no better than a—than a—. We know what their home is. The poor, innocent children! We should be ashamed of ourselves for not seeing that they were looked after years ago! What chance have those poor children of growing up into decent men and women? What will become of them?"

The general feeling had been that every Monaghan child, from Tougy upwards, had shown considerable aptitude in looking after itself. But no one dared voice

that opinion now in face of Mrs. Bates's impassioned sincerity. They waited, still not understanding how Sergeant Bates was relevant to the issue.

Very slowly, very softly, very clearly, Mrs. Bates said: "Children that aren't properly cared for are taken and sent away to Industrial Schools. Children under fourteen. Bridget Monaghan mightn't wish to stay here if her children were taken from her."

Considerable persuasion was necessary before Sergeant Bates could be made to move. But, at last, when he realised that the force of public opinion was behind him, he set in motion the machinery of the law. He spoke to the S.P.C.C. Inspector.

One topic only was on every tongue on the first Wednesday of the month when the application for an order of committal of the younger Monaghan children to Industrial Schools came before the District Court. Even the most conscientious housewives skimped work that morning and no one else, except the publicans, did any work at all. The street was thronged with a holiday crowd when the Monaghans arrived at the Courthouse in Murphy's hired Dodge.

This was the final impudence. The car drove slowly through the village with the Monaghans lolling at ease within. (There was some criticism of Paddy Murphy for hiring his car for such a purpose but the fairer-minded realised that he had his living to make, like the next man.) Bridget Monaghan stepped out first, meek enough in black; after her came Mary, with her handsome head held high and Pius, fatly immaculate in white, in her arms; then followed the twins, their faces red with embarrassment, Pansy, debonairly dandling a matching Jennifer, and, last of all, Toughy, wearing a new corduroy

boiler suit and a ferocious scowl. They passed in silence through the silent crowd.

It was unfortunate for those most deeply interested in the Monaghan case that their District Justice should be a man whose sense of humour approximated to the authentic and remarkably broad type of Gaelic culture so much deplored and condemned by the decent, modern Gael. All day, through drunks, lights and found-ons, he had been looking forward to the Monaghans; now that they were before him, in the privacy of the Childrens' Court, he was not disappointed.

Without comment he heard the Inspector of the S.P.C.C. Then he said, mildly: "They look well-nourished."

"They *look* well-nourished," the Inspector said.

"We can only go on the evidence before us, Inspector."

"Their income is very small. Only what this woman can earn with her dress-making and the little rent she gets for her land."

Mary flushed. She looked straight at the Justice.

"Mother is a good manager. And Tommy—that's my brother—bring his wages home every week."

The Justice was already inclined to think that it was this quiet, handsome girl who was the good manager of the small income. He bent his head courteously at her. He said to the Inspector: "We can ask them. That's often the most satisfactory solution, don't you think?" (He didn't, and neither did the Inspector, but the Justice was enjoying himself immensely). "Are you well fed, children?"

"No," Toughy said.

"Indeed!"

"One spoon of jam each at tea. That's not well fed."

"You seem healthy on it," the Justice said, gravely.

"Oh, I'm healthy, but it's not well fed. Fed," Toughy explained, "but not *well* fed."

He disregarded the reproachful faces of his family. It had been his favourite raspberry jam last night.

The Justice set his quivering lips together. When he spoke, his voice was steady.

"The house is clean and neat?"

The Inspector agreed, grudgingly.

"And the children are certainly clean."

Again, and awfully, Toughy spoke.

"I'm not always as clean as this. That's because they washed me before we came. I'm often dirty, very dirty."

"We can only go on the evidence before us."

"What does that mean?"

"It means we can only judge by what we see."

"That's silly," Toughy said, scornfully. "I mean, about being dirty and seeing. Look at Pius!" Everyone looked. "He gets terrifically dirty. Even right now though he *looks* all clean, he *might* be terrifically dirty and you wouldn't know it."

The Justice snorted. Mary said, despairingly: "Be quiet, Toughy!" But Toughy was not easily repressed today. He said: "Even Pansy gets her face dirty sometimes."

"I don't," Pansy said, indignantly.

"Of course you do. Why would you ever have to wash it if you didn't?"

The Justice said, levelly: "It seems evident that the children are not cruelly treated. They appear remarkably uninhibited." He smiled at the Monaghans, trying not to catch Toughy's piercing eye. "Are you happy and contented in your home, children?"

There was a general murmured assent, shattered by Toughy's loud: "No."

"No?"

"Oh, we're all right," Toughy said, "but we could be happier and contenteder. If you'd stop her"—he nodded at Mary—"washing us too much, and make her give us more jam and sweets and things and not be fussing if clothes get torn—clothes can't help getting torn—and not too early to bed and no school on the days we don't want and never any homework." It was obvious that Toughy, completely misunderstanding the reasons for the presence of himself and his family in Kilmuc courthouse, was bent on making the most of a glorious opportunity afforded him by a benevolent State. "Not to send her to prison or anything like that," he said kindly, "she only does it because she thinks it's good for us, but just to stop her. And stop Pansy, too. When she bothers me." Hastily he added, before Pansy's inarticulate rage could become vocal. "And a horse. For me."

"Well—a horse. . . ."

Toughy sighed.

"I was afraid you couldn't manage that. I just thought you might. But it doesn't matter."

"But you're not to be washed any more today. That," said the Justice, sternly, "is an order."

The Inspector coughed.

"The main point in this case, sir, is not so much the children's bodily well-being as their spiritual welfare. We feel that the mother must be—is—not a good influence." He stuttered under a chill, judicial stare. "We feel that the atmosphere of their home is not morally sound."

"The fact of their existence at all," said the Justice,

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“is, I suppose, not morally sound—but once they’re there, I don’t see what’s to be done about it.”

“I think the fact of their *being* there proves that the mother is unfit to have the care of children.”

“I haven’t been informed of anything against the children’s character so far.”

The Inspector ploughed on hopelessly.

“We are anxious regarding their future.”

The Justice indicated Mary.

“How old are you?”

“Sixteen, your Worship. Almost seventeen.”

“Is there anything derogatory known against this girl’s character?”

“Well—no.”

“Do you mean, *no*?”

“Yes. I mean—yes, I mean no.”

The Inspector was becoming more and more flustered. Silently he cursed the Sergeant who had led him into this misfortune.

“Another boy was mentioned, a farm-labourer.”

“He works with his—with a farmer.”

“Anything known against him?”

“No.”

“Two have grown up decent and respectable in their home?”

“Yes.”

The Justice said nothing. The Inspector made one last effort, solely for his own vindication and not at all for any friendship he might once have entertained, over a bottle of Guinness, for the Sergeant.

“It is felt that children should not be allowed to grow up in a house which is little better than a—than a—”

“Quite!” said the Justice, “Is there evidence to that effect?”

“But, sir, where else——?”

“The ditches of Ireland,” said the Justice, softly, “are deep and broad and fertile.”

“There are other witnesses, sir. Members of Sodalities.”

“Can they give us any elucidation on your last point?”

“Naturally not,” said the Inspector, greatly shocked.

“Then I see no use in continuing. Application dismissed.” The Justice stood up. “Look after your children,” he said to Bridget Monaghan and suddenly realised why she had seemed so strangely familiar from the moment he saw her. She reminded him of a governess once chosen, by reason of her impeccable gentility, to mould his tender years. “You have a large family. It is quite large enough. That is all. You may go.”

The Monaghans began to file out. But Pansy, who had contrived to be last, turned in the doorway.

“Oh, your Highness! You’re not going to send us away!”

“No,” said the Justice, “I’m not.”

“Oh, your Highness! Thank you! If you did, mammy’s—mamma’s—heart would break. We are all she has in the world.”

“She has a lot,” said the Justice.

“We may be poor,” Pansy said, clasping a limp Jennifer to her heart, “but our home is a nest of love.”

“That’s what you couldn’t prove, isn’t it?” said the Justice maliciously to the Inspector. He regarded Pansy approvingly. An actor himself, he appreciated a kindred soul. “Nobody’s going to do anything to you. You can go off now and be happy.”

“Oh, yes!” Pansy said. Slowly she raised her eyes to

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the ceiling while a beatific smile overspread her face. "I can be happy. The shadow is lifted."

"In God's name!" said the Justice, later. "Why was that application brought?"

"Pressure," said the Sergeant, philosophically.

"Yes. I suppose there would be pressure." The Justice laughed but he was angry, too. He objected to the attempt to make of him a tool to eradicate the consequences of erring respectability. "They're nice children," he said.

"They're all right," said the Sergeant. "The only thing anyone has against them is that they shouldn't be there at all."

Hurley's public-house was always full on a Saturday night. Closing time was ten o'clock; after that hour, the shutters were barred and singers requested to moderate their voices.

It was now half-past ten. The bar was crowded and discreetly rowdy; in the small room off the kitchen a select company was gathered. A distinct air of gloom enveloped the small room tonight. It might have emanated from William Bates, who, never a drinking man, had for this once insanely attempted to drown his sorrows and now sat, hunched in his chair, sick and more sorrowful than ever, or from Matthew Hogan, who had uttered one Latin, or maybe Greek, tag within the last forty-five minutes and subsequently spoken no more. Certainly Jim Power, taking his liquor as if he hated it, added not at all to the general comfort, nor did Jamesy Casey, sitting slightly apart with the face of a dreary fox.

The voices of the doctor and the Sergeant enjoying a belligerent argument on politics and religion, covered

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the silence of the others but when these were stilled by a culminating weighty point of the doctor's, the general atmosphere of tension became unmistakable. The doctor frowned.

"What's on you all tonight? Drink up, William, like a man and have another!"

"I've had too much already."

"You're not telling me you can't take it! You, the father of a fine family!" said the doctor, cruelly, who had laughed a lot to himself when he brought the third set of Bates twins into the world.

William rose.

"I've been thinking a great deal for the past few days. It's about a personal matter that concerns others, too. I've been thinking a great deal while I was sitting here." William leaned his hands on the back of his chair. His training as a County Councillor steadied him now. He continued with only a slight hiccup. "I've a problem. There are others that share my problem. And it seems to me providential that those others who share my problem should be present here tonight. I was thinking that if we all got together and threshed out our problem, maybe we could solve it."

"Hear, hear!" said the doctor. Matthew Hogan assumed an air of immense, unconcerned dignity; Jim Power flushed a dull, slow red; Jamsey Casey cocked his head on one side and stared speculatively at William.

"You all know to what I refer," said William.

"I suppose we do," said the doctor.

"Therefore," said William, still speaking very grandly, "if we got together——"

The doctor stood up. He was obviously very disappointed.

"Do you want the Sergeant and myself to go, William?"

"No, doctor. You know all our troubles already; we've no secrets from you. Nor from the Sergeant, either." William flopped into his chair. His Council manner had abandoned him. He looked small and worried and very unhappy. "I can't stand it any longer. It's better to speak out, better to take the bull by the horns. Isn't it, doctor?"

"Much better, William." The doctor's eyes flickered from Jim Power to Matthew Hogan and Jamesy Casey. "It's the—Monaghans, I presume?" he said, delicately.

"Yes. What happened at all at the Court, Sergeant, that nothing could be done?"

"There was no case."

"No case!"

"No," the Sergeant said, "*de jure*, maybe, but not *de facto*. Or so the Justice said," he added, slanderously, seeing the doctor's bright eye upon him.

William's sigh came from the depths of a broken heart. He rallied again.

"Maybe it would make it easier for us to discuss our business in an orderly fashion if we had a chairman?"

Jim Power pushed aside his glass roughly.

"I can't be wasting my time on this nonsense. You're drunk, William! I'll be on my way."

William looked at him pathetically.

"But, Jim, you have an interest, too."

"Too damn' well every son of a —— knows I have an interest!"

"But, Jim," William said, plaintively, "it's for your good. It's for all of us. One for all and all for one."

Jim's scowl was black but he stayed where he was.

"This little matter of a chairman——" the doctor hinted.

"Yes, doctor. Maybe you'd be good enough to take the chair yourself?"

"Delighted!" The doctor sat up straight and rapped the table briskly. "First we must have our terms of reference, William. Perhaps you'd start the ball rolling?"

But William had collapsed once more into a small, huddled heap of misery. He shook his head feebly.

"Terms of reference? To get them out, isn't that what we want? To get the Monaghans out! But no idea—no idea at all. None. Never had any ideas. My wife had ideas. But none any more." He lifted his head, aggressively. "My wife is a fine woman, a very fine woman!"

"Of course she is, William," the doctor said soothingly. He coughed. "Ah—Matthew?"

Matthew removed his pince-nez from his high-bridged nose.

"This matter hardly concerns me very deeply." The doctor's unholy eye transfixed him. "In a manner of speaking." He drew a spotless handkerchief from his coat sleeve and became deeply engrossed in polishing his spectacles. "I have no matrimonial entanglements."

William stirred in the depths of his alcoholic haze.

"No what?"

"No wife, William," the doctor explained kindly.

William glared.

"My wife is a fine woman, a very fine woman."

"No doubt, no doubt," Matthew agreed, hastily.

"*Stat magni nominis umbra.*" William relaxed, mollified. "I am, therefore, not subject to certain—complications which might otherwise arise. Nevertheless, I am pre-

pared to co-operate in any proceeding which may be directed towards the public weal."

"Spoken like a—like the man you are, Matthew," said the chairman. "Any suggestions, though?"

"Well—no."

Matthew adjusted his pince-nez with great dignity on his nose. He felt keenly the disgrace of his position here, but he remained from a wild hope that out of William's drunken notion some general plan might be evolved. Even this final indignity, this public naming of what should, in all decency, be left unuttered amongst gentlemen, would be worth while if it should lead—but how could it?—to ridding him of that beastly, that unutterably beastly, blackmailing creature whom Nature, in a moment of evil perversity, had fathered on him.

The doctor's glance rested for a moment on Jim Power. Jim looked dangerous. Hurriedly the doctor passed on to Jamesey Casey. But Jamesey was never one to rush where he might creep.

"I wouldn't care to speak, doctor, without hearing what clever men like yourself and the Sergeant might have to say."

"I'm the chairman," the doctor said. "I'm here only to keep order."

William stirred. He said, faintly: "Order, order!"

"I'm only the instrument of the Law," said the Sergeant. "If the Law says it can't do any more, then I can't do any more."

Jamesey tilted back his head and drained the last drops of his pint. With extreme deliberation he put down his glass and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"If you're all done, then, I'll say my say."

He cleared his throat and eyed his empty glass reflectively.

In spite of himself, the doctor weakly suggested another round and silently cursed to see Jamesy's sly, satisfied smile.

"Thank you, doctor. Talking's thirsty work."

"No, no!" William said. "No more for me. Too much already."

"I tell you what, doctor," Jamesy said, "we'll get Katie to make him a cup of tea. A good, strong cup. That's what'll put you right, William. I want you to have all your wits about you when you listen to what I'm going to say; because it's business and financial business. I wouldn't want you to be saying afterwards that you were led into this with your eyes closed."

When all the glasses were filled and William was reviving over his good, strong cup of tea, Jamesy began.

"You'll all grant that having the Monaghans around has never worried me any. You know that boy, Tommy, has been working for me for the past month. He's a good lad, as they go. I'd be sorry enough to lose him. But to save the feelings of other decent men, I'd be willing even to do that same. I'm telling you this to show you that I've no personal interest one way or the other, apart from wanting to do what I can to help a neighbour."

His complacency shook his audience with silent rage. "Now, I'm a sensible man and it seems to me that this matter has never been approached in a sensible way. From time to time, attempts have been made to harry and drive and push Bridget Monaghan out of this country-side. But why should she go? She's an independent woman. She has her own little house and her ten acres

of ground. She's planted firm and safe as a rock. She's beholden to no one. She's brought up her children and asked for no assistance from those who might owe it. She got nothing from anyone but the hard word. Is it for the sake of our bright eyes that she'd pull up her roots and leave her little property and go out into the bitter world, not knowing how she'd fare?"

"Well, is it?" asked the doctor impatiently. Jamesy always exasperated him. But Jamesy was not to be hurried. He would take his own time.

"She'll continue to do as she's doing—dig her heels in and more luck to her, say I! There's only one way to get Bridget Monaghan to take herself and her family out of this district." Jamesy paused. He took a long, slow draught from his glass, savouring the atmosphere of tense anticipation. "Lure her!" he said.

The tea had worked well on William. He sat upright, remembering that as a County Councillor and a prosperous business man, he was superior to any small farmer. He frowned at Jamesy.

"What do you mean, lure her? You've a drop too much taken, man!"

"I knew the tea would do you good, William. I'll tell you what I mean. It's a simple plan, but a good one. Buy a nice, tidy farm a very long way from here. Stock it. Then go to Bridget Monaghan and say: There's a farm waiting for you in the County Kildare—or wherever it is. You have a son able to run it. There's a chance for your children that they'll never have here. There's a sure comfortable living for all of you where there'll be no slur on the Monaghan name. In the name of God, Bridget Monaghan, go! And I'd say," said Jamesy, "she'd go."

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After half an hour, it was admitted that there was promise in Jamesy's scheme. At quarter-past twelve, it was allowed to be a good scheme. At one o'clock it was accepted in broad outline and it only remained to decide the details. At length, it was settled that Jamesy himself would travel to view prospective farms no nearer than the County Kildare, would make a suitable purchase and acquaint Bridget Monaghan of her luck, all as speedily as possible. Finally the vital financial question arose and threatened to nullify all the former decisions.

"One thousand pounds," said Jamesy, firmly. "There'd be no use in less. Good land comes dear. And another five hundred for stock and the rest. I'd be ashamed," he said, reprovingly, "to go to the woman otherwise."

Feebly, William said: "We're not millionaires."

"We're sharing it between us, aren't we? There's some of us better off than others, who can give more and feel it less. That way, it will be easy for all of us."

"And how much will you give yourself?"

"Fifty pounds," said Jamesy and calmly waited until the storm died down. "Not that I care one way or the other. You can take it or leave it. I'm gaining nothing by this transaction, only losing a likely lad, apart from all the trouble I'll have going hither and thither, leaving my own little place for days at a time to go to rack and ruin without me. And I'm a poor man—a very poor man, God help me!"

Stubborn and crafty, he smiled at them.

Jim Power had hardly spoken at all. Now he said, drunkenly: "We'd better get on with it. I'll give eight hundred pounds. You can make up the remainder between you."

"I'll give four hundred and fifty," said William. (One hundred, he would tell Julia and trust to God to keep the rest hidden. Surely Julia would consider fifty pounds per twin reasonable.) "You'll have to manage the remaining two hundred, Matthew."

Matthew's eyes opened wide. He had been very eighteenth century tonight. When his stomach had become unable to cope with bulk, he had abandoned his customary ale for port and he realised now that he, too, would have been wiser, if more craven, to turn to good, strong tea. He was not, of course, intoxicated—he could, he hoped, carry his liquor like a gentleman—but he was not quite himself.

"Peccavi," he said, weakly. It was a big price to pay for one sin, of a type neither unusual nor, to sophisticated minds, unbecoming in a literary man. On the Left Bank, one could have had the run of a houseful for less. He stared into the depths of his glass and saw, in that ruby light, an irritating reminder of eroticism at bargain prices in other lands. "*Autres temps, autres moeurs*," he said. Two hundred pounds! Would it be worth two hundred pounds never again to see those horrible fat curls, those horrible pink cheeks, those horrible misty eyes; never again to see Jennifer sneering her painted smile?

"We might get on quicker," the doctor suggested, "if you'd keep to English, Matthew."

"I'm a poor man," said Matthew, "and I have no wife."

William snarled: "You have a daughter," and the doctor said, reprovingly: "I don't like the inference that bachelors are entitled to licentiousness."

Matthew drew forth his snuff-box and flicked a speck of dust from what was almost a cravat.

"It is generally understood that literature brings scant monetary reward, except—" He shrugged his high shoulders—"except for those who pander to the popular taste."

"That was a mighty fine little article of yours on the Comeraghs, all the same," said the doctor. "Very original."

Matthew bowed from the hips.

"Thank you, doctor!" He sneezed three times delicately and put away the snuff box. "I repeat—and I am not ashamed to repeat it—that I am a poor man. Rich in things of the spirit, maybe, but poor in material possessions. Literature," continued Matthew, expanding his chest and speaking in resounding cadence, "brings its own rewards, no doubt—and none appreciates them more than I but—"

William interrupted rudely. He was in the primary pangs of indigestion and very peevish.

"Are you or are you not going to pay your share, Matthew Hogan?"

"As I was endeavouring to illustrate, William—"

"Because if you're not, the whole thing's off." William was becoming more and more sober. He had a notion that they were all making drunken fools of themselves. Maybe it was Jamesy Casey's face that caused these misgivings; Jamesy's face often had this effect on his business associates, but often not soon enough. "So let's have yes or no quickly and be done with it!"

"That's right," said the chairman, heartlessly.

Matthew thought rapidly. Two hundred pounds! A fortune! But no curls, no cheeks, no eyes, no Jennifer. But two hundred pounds! He saw William slowly rising from his chair with a set face. No curls, no cheeks, no—

"Yes," he said, quickly.

William sank back. It was settled now, for good or ill. It would be worth it, if Julia could be kept from discovering about that extra three fifty. He knew he would live in a miserable anticipation for a long, long time. But maybe it wouldn't be as miserable as the way he lived now.

Jamesy smiled.

"I'll pay in my share tomorrow. You'll all do likewise, I suppose?"

William was made doubly uneasy by that smile.

"There must be guarantees."

"The best, of course. The doctor is a witness to our contract. And the Sergeant." But the Sergeant was long since speechlessly lost in a happy dream world of his own. "And we'll see about getting a proper legal agreement drawn up between us, naturally."

The doctor nodded.

"It won't be an equitable document, though; it can't be. There'll be one name missing."

"Whose?" snapped William, crossly alert.

"Ah!" said the doctor, "that's just it. We don't know. And if this plan is carried through quickly enough, we'll never know. He's the man who will benefit most and at no cost to himself. It's a peculiar situation." The doctor nodded again thoughtfully. "Perhaps you'd all prefer to wait until Pius is a little older?"

William pressed a hand to his uneasy stomach.

"We'll get this over as quickly as possible. And I must say I see no reason for smiling, doctor. It's not funny."

"I wasn't really smiling," said the doctor, "that's the expression I get when I'm thinking. How would it be

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if we put a donation box in the bar outside and just marked it 'Pius'?"

Jamesy caught the indignant William by the shoulders and shoved him back into his chair.

"Ach! what matter! It's his luck, whoever he is. Now I want you all to have a doch-an-doris on me!"

Even the Sergeant opened his eyes in astonishment as Jamesy put his hand in his pocket.

IV

THE first week that Tommy Monaghan worked for Jamesy Casey was entirely satisfactory for Jamesy. Tommy arrived punctually in the early morning. He milked one cow and Jamesy milked the other. After their breakfast of porridge and tea and bread and butter—Jamesy had the bread buttered beforehand because he knew, from bitter experience, how thickly and carelessly a lad was inclined to slam on the butter—Tommy did whatever tasks were assigned to him as well as could be expected of a lad his age. He took his dinner and worked on until supper, at six o'clock. Jamesy again buttered the bread for this meal and, when the cups and plates were washed, Tommy left.

The second week, Jamesy was strangely dissatisfied. Tommy was working as well as usual but he had habits that Jamesy didn't like. He was too quick over his meals, for one thing. This, which Jamesy considered a fault in Tommy, he had vainly extolled as a virtue to Tommy's lingering predecessors. But Tommy was different. You wouldn't want to sit long over your meals with a lumbering lout sunk in silence or muttering to you across the table but Tommy's cheerful face was a pleasant sight, he spoke up to you like a man and what he said was worth the listening. But Tommy always stood up from the table when Jamesy could have sat on comfortably

over a cup of tea for another quarter of an hour (and was amazed at himself for knowing he could.)

Also Tommy went straight home after supper. He was entitled to leave then, of course, and Jamesy wouldn't have dreamed of attempting to stop him. Often when he had had a lad not quite so bright, maybe, or amenable because of being a new broom, he had tried to keep him on late in the long evenings, doing a little extra turn here or there, but he knew Tommy would have been polite, but firm, in refusing. Tommy would work the hours for which he was paid and no more. Tommy was no fool. Jamesy was no fool either. He realised that Tommy had come to him for the small wage offered solely for experience and because of Jamesy's vague, false promises that he might be allowed to experiment on the land with his ridiculous notions of improvement. When Tommy considered he had gained sufficient experience, when he discovered the promises were false, he would go. There was no silly softness in Tommy Monaghan. Under his calm, easy manner was a hardness akin to Jamesy's own and Jamesy was proud of this, even though he regretted it, too.

It wasn't to get that extra turn out of Tommy that made Jamesy wish he'd linger awhile in the evenings. It was just that it would have been agreeable to look at the newspaper together, or have a chat over the events of the day or the doings of a neighbour. For the first time in his life, Jamesy had a companion to his taste and was experiencing a need and a capacity for conversation intensified by the long, taciturn years.

On the third Monday that Tommy arrived, he was very quiet at breakfast. Jamesy was feeling good that morning. It was a fine day with a gentle breeze from

the west. It had been pleasant sitting in the shed with his head resting on the cow's flank, with the tingle and hiss of the milk in the pails, with Tommy beyond him and the odd word passing between them. It had been pleasant outside afterwards in the clear air, seeing the blue of the sky deepen with the coming heat, coming into the shadowy chill of the house and blowing the red embers of the fire to pale flame under the pot. Jamesy had never got any pleasure from these things before; he did not know he was getting it now. He knew only that he was healthy and satisfied, that the tea was good and he was glad that Tommy was there. He was happy but it was such a new sensation for him that he did not know that, either.

His happiness didn't last long. Tommy pushed aside his cup and plate, leaned his elbows on the table and said: "I would like to be making a change."

"What?"

The porridge churned in Jamesy's stomach.

"I would like to take my meals at home. If I do that, you must pay me the difference."

The kitchen was hot and stuffy. The day outside, seen through the open door, was hot and stuffy under a tiring, blue sky. The tea was gall in Jamesy's mouth. He said, roughly: "We agreed that you'd eat here."

That was always part of Jamesy's contract. It was cheaper to feed a boy, in Jamesy's fashion, than to pay for his food.

"I didn't know how the food would be, then."

"You knew you weren't coming to a grand hotel. What kind of food are you used to all your life, I'd like to know, that you talk so big?"

"Better food," Tommy said. "Of course," he explained,

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fairly, "that could be due to Mary's cooking. She can make things taste good. I wouldn't expect you to be able to cook like Mary."

"Maybe you'd wish me to hire a cook for you? You've only to say the word."

This heavy sarcasm was unlike Jamesy's practised skill.

"I was asking Mary about the porridge——"

"Oh, so there's something wrong with the porridge, is there?"

"Yes. It's lumpy. And when it isn't lumpy, it's watery. It doesn't do to boil it up quickly in the mornings, the way you do. It should be cooked slowly the night before, in a double saucepan and then cooked again for half an hour before breakfast."

"When I want cookery lessons from your sister, I'll tell you!"

(A bold impudent trouble-maker, the lad was, like all his kind.)

"The only oatmeal you can cook quickly is the stuff you buy in packets. But that's more expensive. I don't suppose you'd like to buy that."

"No," Jamesy said, "I wouldn't." He wondered what was keeping him from throwing this impudent young scoundrel out on his head. He'd have the value of his week's notice out of him, anyway. By God, he would! "I haven't come to this age of my life to start buying fancy packets for the likes of you."

"Mary thinks packet oatmeal is extravagant, too." (Jamesy clenched his fists. He'd be saying something they'd both regret in a moment if the boy kept on dragging in that frozen-faced bitch!) "But she showed me how the porridge should be made and I can do it, if you find it's too much trouble."

"I didn't hire you as a housekeeper, boy."

Tommy laughed.

"I'm afraid I wouldn't be a very good one. But, after all, someone must do the housekeeping and you don't do it very well. Wouldn't you prefer yourself if the porridge was nice and smooth?"

"You needn't worry about me, boy! I've never been faddy." He'd give the lad plenty of rope to hang himself.
"What other complaints have you?"

"The potatoes and the vegetables."

"They're wrong, too, are they?"

Tommy said, frankly: "They're awful."

"So you imagine you'd make a better hand at cooking the dinner, too, do you?"

"I think so."

Jamesy looked at him. He was silent, seeking for the most hurtful thing to say. At last he said, slowly: "It seems to me that all this talk about oatmeal and potatoes and the rest is nothing but an excuse. Maybe now that you've started to work you don't find it so fine after all. Maybe you're tired of digging ditches and raking manure and hoeing cabbages and you're thinking it would be nice for me to be paying you good money to sit at the fire minding the pots and taking your ease like a woman."

Tommy stood up. He said: "If that's what you're thinking, maybe it would be better for me to go."

Jamesy knew a moment of unaccountable panic. But all he said was: "Sit down, lad! Take it easy! You can't walk off as fast as 'all that, you know!'" He waited until Tommy was safely in his chair. "Let's get this straight! What it amounts to is that if I let you do the cooking, you'll take your meals here; if I don't, you'll take them at home and expect me to pay the differ."

Tommy said: "No." His face was white, but he spoke steadily. "It's not only the cooking. It's what we eat. It's not enough."

"By God! to hear you talk, no one would guess the kind of home you come from!"

"My home is all right."

Jamesy laughed coarsely.

"That's not the general opinion."

Tommy stood up again. Wicked with rage and some other emotion which he could not understand, Jamesy grabbed him by the shoulder and pushed him back into his chair.

"We'll have this out once and for all, while we're at it. What do you lack in this house that you imagine is your due?"

He was gripping Tommy's shoulder tightly but the boy looked at him unafraid.

"Tea and bread isn't enough to start the day on."

"You'll be whining around the countryside that you don't get butter, I suppose?"

"Butter? Oh, yes, I get some butter. But we should have an egg in the mornings. And at night."

"You're used to an egg in the great luxury you come from?"

"No, not often. But I wasn't working then. All working men have eggs." Tommy paused a minute and then continued in a rush, feeling that he might as well get all he had to say out together. "And sausages every day for dinner! That's awful," said Tommy, whose vocabulary was limited. "And it's silly."

Jamesy let go his hold and sank back into his chair.

"That's a nice way to speak to your——" He hesitated. "—— to your father!"

"My name," Tommy said, "is Monaghan."

Jamesy had never struck anyone. His tongue had served him better than his fists. But now, for the first time, his wounding, crafty weapon failed him and he longed, above all, to hit out at this boy who defied him. The effort to control himself left him weak with impotent rage.

"...silly," Tommy was saying. "It's the same as feeding a horse. If you want a horse to work properly, you must feed him properly. If we ate more, we could work more. We'd work better. If we killed a pig—"

Jamesy laughed croakingly.

"Oh! You want me to kill a pig for you!"

"Everyone else does. Then we could have bacon every day and maybe buy a bit of fresh meat for Sundays. It's silly," said Tommy, "to be selling all the food you produce and starving yourself."

"Silly to have money in the bank, eh?"

"It's not much good having money in the bank if you don't ever use it. Beside, it's—it's silly." Tommy's freckled face was very earnest. His brow was furrowed in intense concentration. "It's like putting back into the land what you take out of it. You have to. If you don't, the land dies. It becomes like those dust-bowls in America that were in a book Miss Kelly lent me. If we ate properly, we could produce more and—"

He faltered. Jamesy was staring strangely at him. There was silence while the two faces, so like, so unlike, confronted each other. Slowly, Jamesy smiled.

"We've wasted a lot of time over breakfast," he said. "We'd better be getting on with what we have to do."

For dinner they had the sausages bought the previous day, but in the evening Jamesy put two eggs to boil beside

the kettle. Afterwards, as Tommy was preparing to leave, Jamesy called him.

“Aren’t you going to stay and cook the porridge for tomorrow?”

“We haven’t a double saucepan.”

“I’ll get one on Friday in Kilmuc. You can stay on after tea then and do your cookery. You said it would take two hours.”

“But it cooks itself; nobody has to mind it.”

“You mean you won’t have to stay in the evenings?”

Tommy began to explain the advantages of a double saucepan but Jamesy cut him short abruptly.

“All right. Get along home, so!”

He stood in the doorway watching Tommy walk away. At the gate Tommy turned and called: “Good-night!” Jamesy nodded briefly. But he stood there until Tommy was out of sight down the road and stood awhile longer looking at the ugly farmyard, at the mean cowshed, at the pigs grunting in their pen, at the manure heap steaming gently under the golden sun and then he turned and went into the little kitchen that struck chill and dark after the warm, muted glow outside, and sat by the dying fire with his newspaper, not reading it, not troubling to blow the sulky ashes, only thinking.

At length he smiled his crooked knowing smile, poked the logs together with his toe and began to turn the wheel, humming a croaking raven song as the tiny sparks flew up and shone in his narrowed eyes.

The double saucepan came. The porridge was smoother. Jamesy still buttered the bread but there was always an egg at Tommy’s place at table even if frequently Jamesy’s had none, when his heart faltered at the good price eggs

were fetching in Kilmuc. Tommy cooked the vegetables; at first, they were no different than under Jamesy's inexpert care, but, after a week of worry, they became more like what Tommy said they should be. But still, sausages, of the cheaper variety, accompanied them every day for a fortnight and Jamesy's expression at dinner dared Tommy to criticise when he had been met half-way with the eggs. Tommy said nothing. He, too, agreed silently that an honourable compromise had been reached. However, sausages pall eventually even on a healthy young stomach, and the day arrived when Tommy found himself unable to swallow the too-familiar objects. He tried, it was obvious he tried, but his wearied palate revolted. That night, as he was leaving, Jamesy said, casually: "You might as well call around to Phil Donoghue and ask him will he give a hand with killing a pig in the morning." Jamesy bent to poke the fire. His face was turned from Tommy. "That old sow. She's past her prime. Might as well eat her."

When Phil Donoghue got the message, he stared at Tommy in amazement.

"You're not telling me that fellow means to put one of his pigs in his own belly!" He whistled. "I wouldn't touch her when she's bacon, if I were you. She must have some real bad disease that he can't sell her."

Tommy said, solidly: "She's a healthy pig."

Phil looked at him.

"How are you getting on with Jamesy?" he asked, curiously.

"All right."

"If you are, you're the first one that ever got on with that old—" Phil hesitated. No one yet knew how to speak to a Monaghan of its father. "Halpin of the Grange

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above told me the other day that he was looking out for a lad. As a matter of fact, we happened to mention you."

"I'm all right where I am," Tommy said.

"Halpin pays good wages."

"I'm all right."

The pig was killed next morning. For his trouble, Phil Donoghue got a small Guinness, one half-crown and a portion of the meat to take home. He had expected no more but he grumbled.

"The old skin-flint! My God! You could see it going through his heart when he handed me his miserable half-dollar!"

Tommy said nothing.

"Wouldn't you think he'd give the place a lick of lime inside and out? The cows are as well housed as himself. I declare to my God it's the most miserable shack in the countryside."

Tommy looked at him. It was one of the occasions when his resemblance to his father was most marked.

"Well," Phil said, kindly, "don't let him play on you too much." He had three children himself, and he didn't care for the thought of this young lad being worked to death by old Jamesy. A decent honest lad, too—the type that was into Jamesy's barrow! "And remember, any time you want me to give the nod to Halpin——!"

"I'm all right," Tommy said.

Phil had left a bucket of pig's blood in the outhouse. Jamesy stood frowning over it later that evening.

"Do you know how to make black puddings, Tommy?"

"No. Not properly. I know you mix things with the blood and pour it into the pig's guts and tie the puddings up and boil them. But that's all I know." He added, scornfully: "It's women's work."

“Puddings or no puddings, I’m not going to have a strange woman inside this house, fussing and interfering.”

“No,” said Tommy.

“Does your sister know how to make puddings?”

“She does.”

“She can come along tomorrow, so, and do the job.”

“She wouldn’t come. Besides, she might interfere too. She might criticise.”

“What the hell do I care if she criticises or not! Tell her to come!”

“She wouldn’t come.”

“I’m not asking a favour. I’ll pay her, you understand.”

“She wouldn’t come to your house.”

There was a dark silence between them. Jamesy’s face grew bitter and wicked. Tommy, waited, unperturbed. Then Jamesy pushed the bucket roughly with his foot.

“Take away this rubbish and empty it down the drain!”

Tommy’s brows knitted.

“We could give it to some poor woman who’d be glad to use it. It’s a pity to waste it.”

“Do as I tell you!”

“All right.” Tommy carried the bucket across the yard. He tilted it over the drain and shook his head as the blood flowed away. “Mind you,” he said, thoughtfully, “it’s a pity, all the same. Black puddings are nice.”

Jamesy’s ill humour abated gradually. His spells of viciousness were becoming less frequent during these weeks. His tongue, that had always served him so well, was futile against Tommy. When he lashed out with some stinging phrase, Tommy would, listen, politely and seriously, and then, if he thought Jamesy was wrong, explain why he thought so and if not, agree. Only through his home and his family was Tommy vulnerable

and here Jamesy feared to attack. He knew that if he allowed himself this indulgence, one day Tommy, still polite, still serious, would walk away never to return. So Jamesy was learning to curb his evil twisted wit that had never known restraint. He wouldn't care to lose this boy yet. He was a useful boy. That was all there was to it. He got more willing work out of him than out of the usual rubbish. That was all there was to it.

At tea, the bread was unbuttered. There was a lump of butter in a saucer on the table. Tommy spread the butter on his bread as sparsely as Jamesy had done. Jamesy watched him. He made no comment. When the meal was finished, he said: "You'd better take some of the fresh meat and the insides home with you. We can't eat it all."

Tommy said: "No, thank you!" He was washing the tea things in a bowl on the table. His face was turned from Jamesy but between his thick, cropped hair and the collar of his coat a red flush deepened on his uncovered neck.

Jamesy said, slowly: "I tell you we can't eat it all, boy!"

"Maybe we can."

Jamesy's eyes were fixed steadily on the revealing blush.

"Don't they like pork at your house?"

"They do."

"We needn't begrudge them what we can spare."

Tommy turned around. His face was as red as his neck but his eyes were as stubborn as Jamesy's own.

"They wouldn't take it. We don't," said Tommy, even now almost managing to sound polite, "take charity."

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The tentative benefactor scowled.

“It’s not charity. The maggots’ll get it, else.”

Tommy said nothing. Jamesy’s tongue flicked out between his teeth.

“I suppose it’s that—sister of yours again?”

“Yes.” Anyone might have quailed before that twisted mouth but not Tommy. “I think the same as she does.”

Jamesy’s body seemed to arch and bend like a taut spring. His nails dug into the palms of his hands. Then, with a grunting suspiration, he relaxed. He spat into the red heart of the fire.

“Be off home with you, then! What are you dawdling for?”

“We’d want to do a bit of whitewashing,” Tommy said.

They were picking potatoes, a dull, back-breaking job that improves no man’s humour. It did not improve Jamesy’s. He straightened up with a curse, clapped a hand to his aching spine and scowled at Tommy.

“Haven’t we enough to do without bringing more on ourselves?”

“We’ve plenty, but we’d better do that, all the same.” Tommy glanced across the field at the little house standing forlorn and dingy under the bright sun. “It needs whitewash.”

“It can keep on needing it!”

Tommy’s earnest face was worried.

“It looks awful.”

“If I can bear the look of it, I suppose you can.”

“I don’t like to have people talking about it.”

“If people would mind their own business, it would

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be much better for everyone. And that applies to you, too, boy."

Tommy said, with that stubbornness that was the last straw to Jamesy's every aching muscle: "It is my business."

"Since when," Jamesy asked, dangerously, "has my house become your business?"

"Since I came to work for you, of course," Tommy explained, wearily but patiently.

"Oh!" Jamesy said, slowly. "Oh!" He bent again to his task. "So people talk about——" he paused "—our house, do they?"

"They do."

"And what do you say to them?"

"I tell them we're busy now but we're going to do it when we have time."

"I see. Damn this sciatica! Well, I suppose we are, aren't we?"

"I suppose we are, but I think we should do it soon."

"Just to stop the neighbours talking, eh?"

"Yes."

"So you don't like to hear them criticising—our house?"

"No."

"Aren't you a soft young fool to be paying heed to the neighbour's gabble!" said Jamesy.

The house was whitewashed, inside and out. Still Tommy was not satisfied. Every outhouse and lean-to, every inch of the farmyard wall was whitewashed, with Jamesy sweating and grumbling over the waste of time and labour and still Tommy was not satisfied. With all around him gleaming white and clean, he raised his eyes ambitiously to the battered tin roof.

"That's awful," Tommy said.

It was the end of a long, tiring day. Tommy would never learn to be tactful. However, in the present instance, even the utmost delicacy of tact would have left Jamesy unappeased.

"And how are you going to improve it?"

"Paint it," Tommy said.

For the first time in his life, Jamesy was speechless.

"Red, I think. Yes, red. Red looks nice with white."

Jamesy's mouth and throat moved convulsively but nothing evolved but an incoherent, agonised grunt. "Of course paint is a bit expensive but the roof is small. It wouldn't take much. And we could have the door and the woodwork red, too. That," said Tommy, becoming enthusiastic over his vision, "would be very nice."

Jamesy managed to speak, not all he was thinking, but some of it.

• "If you imagine that to please you or anyone else I'm going to live in a doll's house, you can—"

Crudely, but expressively, he told Tommy what he could do. With his head on one side, gaze steadily fixed on the roof, Tommy considered a trifle sadly.

"It might be a little bright," he agreed, at length. "Nice, you know, but bright. Black wouldn't be bad. You wouldn't mind that, would you? You wouldn't mind a black roof?" His tone indicated that there could be no possible objection to a black roof. "And that would be cheap—we could use tar." He said, firmly, obviously feeling that having conceded so much, he was on unassailable ground: "and we could have green paint for the door and the woodwork. I'm sure that wouldn't look like a doll's house. Of course," he admitted fairly, "I never saw one."

Jamesy said, hoarsely: "I never saw one either."

"Didn't you?" Tommy was surprised. "Then what made you think that a red roof and——"

"I saw pictures of them!" Jamesy roared. He was a broken man.

The roof was black. The door and window frames were a clear, grass-green. Tommy was not satisfied.

"It looks nice now," he said, "but it's a bit bare. We could make a flower bed all along the length of the house and put rambler roses up against the wall. Red roses." He was evidently determined to include red in his colour scheme by hook or by crook. "And flowering bushes by the gate—big ones. It's not the right time of the year for transplanting but we can try it. It will look very nice next spring."

Jamesy said, oddly: "You'll like looking at them next spring, will you?" He grunted. "How much is this going to cost me?"

"Nothing. We'll have to put up wire netting to keep the animals off the flower-bed but there's some of that thrown in the shed, and stakes, too."

"And where are the roses and all the rest to come from?"

"There's plenty of those to spare at home."

Jamesy looked at him.

"I don't take charity, either."

"But this is *flowers*."

"Flowers or pork," said Jamesy, "it's the one thing."

They had reached an impasse. While Jamesy continued to look at him, Tommy gazed mournfully at the house, as if he saw already the blossoms fading before ever they bloomed.

"It's a pity," he said. "They would have been very

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nice. Of course, it's a nice little house now, but with the flowers it would have been very nice."

Jamesy said, suddenly: "I'll pay for them with eggs."

Tommy turned to him with a gasp of relief.

"Yes! You could, couldn't you?"

"I could," said Jamesy, "but, mind you! it will take a hell of a lot of flowers to equal one good dozen of eggs."

Tommy's fifteenth birthday fell on the fair-day in Kilmuc. At six o'clock in the morning, he and Jamesy and Collie, the sheepdog, were on their way to Kilmuc with three bullocks, two thriving and one a perisher. It was a fine morning. Tommy whistled as he strode along, happy with youth and the morning air. Collie went about his business with an enjoyment that he was only lately beginning to evince. He had always been a moody dog, and sullen as his master; since Tommy's arrival his disposition had improved considerably. Tommy was not sentimental with animals, but he had pleased and surprised Collie by giving a pat and a word of praise for good work, where previously there had been only a kick and a curse for bad. Collie trotted on proudly now, feathery tail held high. Jamesy followed slightly in the rear with his peculiar crab slouch, puffing rank smoke from the first pipe of the day.

At the turn of the road, Tommy waited for him.

"I like this time. Everything looks clean and washed."

Jamesy grunted.

"You're a great one for cleanliness. I've no objection to a bit of dirt here and there. It's natural, dirt is." He rammed the glowing shag into the bowl of his pipe with a calloused forefinger. "You're looking very pleased with yourself this morning."

“It’s my birthday.”

“Huh! A great day for Ireland!”

“I’ll be going home to supper this evening. Mary’s baking a cake.”

Jamesy shifted his pipe and spat out of the corner of his mouth.

“Birthday party, is it? It’s a wonder you’re not ashamed to let them make such a right babby of you at your house!”

“I don’t mind. I like cake.”

He darted ahead to prevent the witless bullocks wandering down a bohcreen. Jamesy shambled on at the same even pace, his shoulder high and thrust before him, his face darkening.

There was a weary wait in Kilmuc before the bullocks were sold. Jamesy was determined that the perisher and the thriving pair should go in one bunch. He was deaf to all pleas to split them and at last got his way and a fair price. He handed Tommy a list of messages to do in the village.

“Call back for me to Hurley’s in an hour. And here!” He drew Tommy aside and said, in a quick whisper: “Get something for yourself, for your birthday.” He pulled out a handful of coins, looked at them speculatively, slowly took up a florin and as slowly added a sixpence. “For yourself.” He stared fiercely into Tommy’s eyes. “A present.”

There was a moment while both stood motionless. Then Tommy took the money. “Thank you!” he said and went off abruptly.

William Bates’s shop was filled with men and women requiring quick service and talk. The impossibility of combining both always drove William, on a fair day, to

the nearest he would ever get to neurosis. He was almost relieved to see Jamesy, whom ordinarily he disliked as much as anyone else did. Jamesy, at least, wouldn't waste his time. But this, inexplicably, was what Jamesy did today.

"I want a cake," Jamesy said.

"Brown or white?"

"Not cake bread. A fancy cake."

William was too rushed to be surprised. He shoved a cardboard box across the counter.

"Two-and-six."

Jamesy opened the box and regarded the Swiss roll inside with extreme disfavour.

"That's a poor-looking cake! Have you nothing better?"

William turned to the shelves.

"Here's a fruit cake! Three-and-six. I'll be with you in a moment, Mrs. Daly."

Jamesy opened this box, too, and seemed to think no better of its contents.

"What's in it?"

"Fruit. Currants and raisins. It's a very good cake."

"It doesn't look much," Jamesy said. "It doesn't look a good cake at all."

"It's the best I have. Right now, Mrs. Thompson—just a second!"

"There's a cake in the window——" Jamesy said.

There was a cake in the window. It was at the extreme outside of the window and between it and William was a tastefully arranged pyramid of tinned foods.

William said, desperately: "That's not such a good cake."

Jamesy remained unmoved.

"I'd like to see it."

In silent rage, William slid aside the window barrier and reached downwards. For a short-armed, pot-bellied little man, the cake was as unattainable as if it were on the street outside but William was not aware of this until most of the tins had cascaded down to roll about the unmoved object of Jamesy's desire. Then, panting and red-faced, he summoned his assistant and at last the cake was brought from the ruined window and placed before Jamesy.

"That's a right fancy cake," Jamesy said, approvingly. It was a right fancy cake. It was covered with bright yellow icing and decorated, crudely but effectively, with glistening green and yellow sweets. "I'll take that one."

"Three-and-six," William said, wearily.

"I'll give you three shillings clear for it."

William had often wished himself a braver man, but seldom so intensely as now. While his hands shook and his face swelled, all he said was: "The price is three-and-sixpence."

Jamesy shook his head.

"It couldn't be. The other cake—the one you said was better—was three-and-six. If this one isn't as good," continued Jamesy, patiently, "how could it cost the same?"

"Just now, m'am! Take it and be done!" said William, wildly. "Can't you see I'm busy!"

Jamesy smiled.

Tommy was waiting for him at Hurley's. They set off homewards. The sun was high now; they were tired with the heat of day, and the travelling. They spoke little. Jamesy was t'linking; secretively he kept eyeing Tommy whose hand stole ever and again to his pocket, seeming

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to fondle something there. At last he said, looking straight ahead: "Did you spend your money?"

"I did."

"Sweets, I suppose?"

"No." Tommy put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a mouth-organ. "This."

"Huh! Can you play it?"

"No. But it's easy to learn. I always thought I'd like to have one."

"Did you, now? I suppose they gave you presents at your house this morning?"

"They did."

"What did they give you?"

"A belt. And a spotty handkerchief. And mother made me a shirt."

"Aye! So you always wanted a mouth-organ?"

"Yes," Tommy said and looked at it affectionately.

Jamesy's step quickened. He said: "I used to be able to manage one of those when I was young. I wonder would I have any of the knack left?" He took the instrument. "There was 'Faith of Our Fathers', I remember, and 'Lily of Laguna'." He gave the mouth-organ a trial run across his lips. "There was a lot more besides, but those are the two I call best to mind."

He cradled the mouth-organ in the approved orthodox fashion in the palm of his right hand, put it to his mouth, took a deep breath, and blew. To a tune that had the tempo, if not all the notes, of 'Faith of Our Fathers' he and Tommy marched along the road with Collie, alert now, rushing around them with punctuating barks.

(Those who passed the way were surprised at the sight of Jamesy Casey coming home apparently drunk for the first time in his life from the fair.)

The yellow cake graced the supper table next evening.

"Got it from William Bates," Jamesy explained. "A thing he couldn't get rid of, likely."

"It's a good cake," Tommy said and took a second biliary slice.

"Is it so? I never bother with those trash of cakes myself. I suppose," Jamesy said casually, "it wouldn't be anything like that cake you were talking about yesterday, the one they were making for you at your house?"

"That was a nice cake, too. It was plain outside, though."

"Ah!" Complacently Jamesy regarded the glistening icing. "And inside—was that plain?"

(The yellow cake was in three portions, glued together with a strange, gelatinous substance.)

"It had jam in it."

"Just plain jam?"

"Yes."

Jamesy helped him to a third slice.

The gardening was finished for the past week and once more Tommy left for home directly after supper. While he washed up now, Jamesy sat silent, by the fire. As Tommy was wringing out his dish-cloth—Tommy was neat as a woman in all he did—Jamesy asked, suddenly: "What do you do with yourself in the evenings?"

"Oh, I do any odd job that might be wanted around the house. Or kick football, sometimes. Or may be go down to Quealy's to listen to the wireless."

"You like the wireless?"

"Oh, I do!" Tommy's face lit up eagerly. "There are great talks on it sometimes, only," said Tommy, mournfully, "I don't get much chance to listen to those, unless

I'd be left alone in Quealy's kitchen and that's not often. The Quealys wouldn't be bothered with talks, only music and the like. It's a pity, because you'd be surprised what you could learn. There was a series on agriculture, now—it was very interesting but I didn't get more than half of the talks. I find I can learn easier from hearing things than reading about them." Tommy folded the dish-cloth sadly. "I was always stupid about books."

"You're not stupid," Jamesy said, angrily, but Tommy shook his head.

"I am. Only for that, I'd have gone for an agricultural scholarship. It was Miss Kelly gave me the idea. She worked over me for a year but it was no use. I could learn about the way things grow and that part of it, all right, but I could make no hand at all of the history and arithmetic and the rest."

Jamesy's long nose twitched disdainfully.

"What use would history and that rubbish be to a man with a farm?" He paused. "It's a funny thing you mentioning wireless. I was thinking lately," said Jamesy, steadily "of getting a cheap class of wireless for myself here. It'd be company, like, in the winter for me." He added, carelessly: "You'd be welcome to stay on in the evenings and listen to it yourself any time you wished."

The cost of the cheapest wireless shocked and saddened Jamesy. As some slight compensation, he refrained from the half-crown increase to Tommy's weekly wage which he had contemplated before his extravagant purchase. What the lad didn't know, he wouldn't miss.

And, take it all in all, maybe the wireless was worth it. Tommy seldom left for home now before nine o'clock at night. And Tommy, Jamesy admitted to himself, was the kind of boy that you got used to having around.

V

IN June, Willie and Sissy sat for their scholarship examination in Waterford.

It was such samples of ostentatious Monaghan pride, where there was cause only for grovelling humility, that left even the best-intentioned neighbours bereft of Christian charity. Miss Kelly came in for much censure for having encouraged their soaring ambitions. There was a universal, but faint, hope that they might fail.

The results came at the beginning of August. Out of the ten scholarships offered, Sissy had secured fourth place, Willie sixth. The injustice of the world was recognised anew. Better children than these—children whose right to exist was indisputable—must be content with the schooling the State gave them up to fourteen, but the State would pay to keep Monaghans at boarding-schools and make ladies and gentlemen out of them.

“At least,” Mrs. Bates said, bitterly, “they’ll be away part of the time.”

“All the time soon, I hope,” William reminded her.

Mrs. Bates had never become quite reconciled to the expenditure of the hundred pounds of which William had informed her. She said now: “Maybe so, and maybe not. I can’t help thinking that there’s a catch in it somewhere.”

She had voiced this unfounded suspicion endlessly.

Endlessly William had contradicted it, as he did again.

"But how can there be, my dear? It's all open and above board. The money stays in the bank until the sale is definitely arranged, and then it will be done through solicitors."

"Maybe so. But you're a rabbit, William Bates, and Jamesy Casey is a fox, and I never yet saw a rabbit getting the better of a fox."

Patiently, William said: "But it isn't a question of anyone getting the better of anyone else, my dear. It's for the good of us all. And you wouldn't say Jim Power was a fool, would you?"

"Compared to Jamesy Cascy," Mrs. Bates declared emphatically, "you're all fools!"

William sighed. Then, with a faint spurt of driven courage, he said: "Those twins must have brains."

Mrs. Bates looked at him. He shrank before her, terrified of his hinted paternal pride in the unlawful pair.

"It's well for them that it's only their faces take after you." She kept on looking at him. "Pius," she said, "has grey eyes."

So had William. He stared at her in horror.

"My God! Julia, you don't imagine—"

"I'm not imagining anything. I merely said that Pius has grey eyes."

The twins were calmly pleased with their success. They had worked for it and expected it. They would continue to work, and to succeed.

"And I'll never get married," Sissy said.

Willie said, dutifully: "I don't suppose I will, either."

"You can if you like, Willie. It's different for you. But in Ireland, a woman loses her job when she marries.

I'd be depending on my husband. I want to depend on myself. That's the only way I'll feel safe."

"I'll be there for you to depend on," Willie said, stoutly.

"It wouldn't be the same, Willie." She looked at him and said, firmly: "You might die."

"But why would I die if you wouldn't?" Willie was slightly annoyed. "I'm only half-an-hour older."

"There are accidents. And things," she said, vaguely. She stared wide-eyed at an insecure world. "But if I depend on myself I'll always be safe. Even when I'm old there'll be a pension. We'll both be safe for ever, Willie."

Sitting apart and listening to them, Mary smiled a little sadly. She raised her eyes from her sewing and looked out the window. The sunshine lay bright and hot outside, the sky was a clear high blue, the leaves of the plane tree by the gate danced in a little wind. Outside was life and colour, but not for her. Never for her. The moment of regret passed quickly, as all such moments passed with Mary. She smiled at the twins and bent her gaze patiently to her sewing again.

She said, a few days later, to Miss Kelly: "It's such a short while until September." She paused. Suddenly she looked very young and helpless, sitting there with her feet planted together on the floor and her hands folded in her lap. With an angry, troubling pity, Miss Kelly said: "You take too much on yourself, Mary! It's not right, at your age. It's not good for you."

"I'm very healthy," Mary said, sensibly, and Miss Kelly laughed, but it was angry laughter.

"Don't you ever want to be young and foolish and irresponsible?"

"Not often." She hesitated. "I don't think I'm naturally very gay and bright. I'm rather quiet and dull, I think."

Grimly, Miss Kelly recalled the little girl of ten who had to scamp her home-work to care for her young brothers and sisters, the girl of fourteen who had refused to sit for a scholarship, "because," she explained, "I couldn't take it if I got it, so I'd much rather not get it and then I won't have anything to be sorry about." She said, crossly: "There was very little opportunity of knowing how gay and bright you might be," and then said no more, afraid of saying too much.

"The nuns," said Mary, frowning, "would take Sissy at reduced fees. But, even so, there are other expenses—for clothes and books—and things such as hockey sticks and so on. They all add up. I want Willie and Sissy to have as good as the others. I don't want them to feel different. It's bad, when you're young."

"Very bad," Miss Kelly said. She stopped. "I wish you would let me help, Mary!"

"You know I can't do that."

Miss Kelly shook her head slowly.

"I don't, Mary. You know I'm fond of those twins, very fond. And proud. They're a credit to me; they'll be a greater credit yet."

"I have good reasons, Miss Kelly. There are people who might have been expected to help us and they never did. I'm glad they didn't. I'd rather we all starved than be helped by those people." Her soft mouth curved in a bitter line. She said, harshly: "I'd take a penny from the poorest beggar on the roads sooner than I'd have us beholden to one of those!" She was silent. Then she smiled. "So you see I like to know that whatever we

do, we do on our own, without help from anyone.” Her voice was gentle again. “Even from you, Miss Kelly.”

Miss Kelly sighed.

“Why do the young always try to make things more difficult for themselves? I’ve forgotten.”

A week later Mary went to Kilmuc to buy boots for Tommy. As she was passing down the street on her way home, she was surprised to hear Johanna Hogan call her from the doorway of the shop. Reluctantly she crossed the street.

“Pansy?” she asked, wearily.

“Pansy!” Johanna frowned. “Oh! you mean my niece,” she said, matter-of-factly. “No, it’s nothing to do with her. I want to speak to yourself.”

Mary stood rigidly.

“Yes?”

“Will you come in?”

Johanna led the way across the shop and into the kitchen without one backward glance so that her confidence constrained Mary, much against her will, to follow. She had a quick glimpse of Matthew’s startled face teething whitely behind the counter and then she was in the kitchen with the door closed and Johanna bustling hospitably around her.

“Sit down!” said Johanna and pushed forward the most comfortable, Matthew’s, chair.

Mary hesitated.

“Is it worth while? I’m in a hurry home.”

Johanna said: “You might as well sit as stand,” and Mary sat on the extreme edge of the seat considered (by Matthew) sacrosanct to Matthew. Johanna nodded, took

a teapot from the shelf and looked with satisfaction at the kettle singing on the range.

“I always like a cup of tea at this hour.”

Mary said nothing. But when Johanna, with the tea-caddy in her hand, asked: “Do you like it strong or weak?” Mary said: “I don’t want any tea, thank you.”

Johanna held the tea-caddy poised.

“Did you walk from Doon?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re walking back?”

“Yes.”

“Then, of course,” said Johanna, firmly, “you want tea.”

Mary sat up straight. With an attempt at equal firmness, she said: “I won’t have any tea,” but, even to her own ears, her refusal was a degeneration to plain and simple rudeness. Johanna stared hard at her. She put down the tea-caddy. She drew a deep breath.

“I am not,” said Johanna, incontestably, “my brother.” There was a moment’s silence. Then Johanna made the tea. She poured out a cup for Mary and one for herself. She said: “Miss Kelly tells me you’re having difficulty about the twins.”

Mary’s hurt pride flamed in her cheeks. She opened her mouth to speak, shut it, gulped and swallowed. At last she said, in a small chill voice: “I had no idea that Miss Kelly would——”

“Oh! you needn’t worry!” Johanna said. “Miss Kelly doesn’t gab. At least, only to me, and naturally I don’t call that gabbing.”

Still in that little, icy voice, Mary said: “She may have exaggerated the difficulties. It is really no one’s concern

but ours, and we have always been able to manage our own business quite well."

She stood up. Johanna sneezed.

"Sit down, child, and don't be silly! I wish you wouldn't keep sticking out your quills—I detest touchy people. You needn't imagine I intend hurting your feelings by offering you money. Even if I could afford it, which I can't, and you'd take it, which you wouldn't, I see no reason for me to be generous to your family merely because your half-sister happens to be my niece, an occurrence for which neither you nor I are responsible. Besides," said Johanna thoughtfully, "I don't like Pansy very much; in fact, I don't like her at all. She is not by any means an admirable character." Johanna shook her head, musingly: "She is very like Matthew—very." With a quick glance at Mary, she said, crossly: "*Do* sit down, child! You get on my nerves standing over me like that," and this time Mary obeyed. Johanna pushed the bread-plate near her. "Eat something!" She took a slice of bread herself, held it in one hand and her cup in the other, put her feet on the fender and planted her elbows comfortably on her knees. "I probably wouldn't like the twins either. Miss Kelly speaks well of them but she's inclined to be sentimental. I'm not. I haven't much use for children, particularly at the gangling stage." She put her head on one side and regarded Mary. "I like a nice, steady, sensible girl. You seem to be a sensible girl; at least you would be if you didn't fidget and sat quiet and listened."

Mary said, meekly: "I am listening."

Johanna raised either hand and took a bite and a sup.

"The obvious thing to do would be to let Miss Kelly help you. She's old enough to know her own mind and

if she wants to make a fool of herself, I don't see why you should stop her. However, you did stop her. The only other obvious thing is for you to earn some money."

Mary said: "I've thought of that, too. But there's so little I can do—and I couldn't go away from home."

"You are capable of looking after your family, aren't you? If you can look after those, you can look after anyone. As I was talking to Belinda Kelly," said Johanna, "all at once I saw a means of killing a number of birds with one stone. So there and then I went about it. You know Darmody's, the public-house at the end of the street?"

Mary said, slowly: "I've heard of the Darmodys."

"I've no doubt you have," Johanna agreed, drily. "Florrie Darmody appeared in her nightgown on the street at eleven o'clock last Tuesday night. It took the combined effort of quite a number of scandalised souls to dissuade her from taking a little exercise. Her nightgown," Johanna remarked, disapprovingly "was certainly not clean enough for a walk in public. Well, child, the Darmodys are friends of mine and they are looking for a housekeeper. I went straight from Belinda Kelly and told them about you. If you care to take it, the job is there for you. Eight until six, so that you can go home in the evenings to mind that assorted brood of yours. We agreed on the wages, too."

She mentioned them. Mary gave a slight gasp. Johanna held up her hand.

"Yes, they're big; they need to be, to counter the disadvantages. Florrie, of course, is the chief disadvantage; indeed, I might say, the only one, because Paul is a harmless man. She's sane when she's sober, which is comparatively infrequent: when she's not sober, she become a

theologian. Most trying! The last time I spoke to her she was very worried about the bird and the flame, so she told me. She was convinced that the Holy Trinity should be the Holy Quad-whatever-it-is and that we'd all be damned for our ignorance. *Most trying!*" Johanna frowned. "You can understand why that unfortunate brother of hers finds it difficult, even at a grossly inflated wage, to get a competent person to care for his house."

Mary said, eagerly: "It's a lot of money." She thought of the placid confidence of the earnest, industrious twins, and the thought no longer hurt. "It would make all the difference." She hesitated. "But would Mr. Darmody. . . ? He might think . . . I'm afraid," Mary said, miserably, "I look a bit young."

Johanna said, briskly: "Naturally. But that won't worry Paul. He's had them at all ages—sluts or bullies. Besides," Johanna told her, rather coldly, "I told him you would suit."

Dazedly, Mary said: "You are very good."

"Not at all. My chief concern is for those unfortunate Darmodys; the fact that it may be of benefit to you is purely incidental. I flatter myself that I am a sufficient judge of character to know that, even if you won't be able to prevent Florrie from perambulating at unreasonable hours, at least you'll see to it that she does so in clean garments." Johanna rose. "We may as well go along now and settle the business."

At the Darmody's, Johanna did most of the talking. Paul Darmody agreed with all she said. Opposed to Johanna's supreme self-confidence, his shyness was painfully apparent. He hardly glanced at all at Mary. He was low-sized and of slight and delicate build. His

fair hair was greying; his face was gentle, his eyes tired but kind. His voice, too, was gentle but Johanna gave him little opportunity of using it. Only at the beginning did he hazard a hesitant objection.

“I hadn’t realised she was quite so young.”

“Seventeen,” said Johanna. “Of course, if you consider *that* young——!”

Her outraged tone defied anyone to do so.

Paul said, hastily: “Quite so, quite so. But——” He addressed Mary directly. “——my sister is—rather difficult.”

“I’ve explained all that,” Johanna said, grimly. After a further ten minutes, she stood up. “It’s settled now and I hope you’ll both be pleased. And mind, Paul, she’s to leave punctually at six, to attend to whatever she has to do at home!”

“Yes, yes. I wouldn’t dream of keeping her.”

“And she will need,” said Johanna, and looked him straight in the eye, “another half-crown added to her wages.”

The door opened. Florrie Darmody came in. She was ten years older than Paul, tall and gaunt, with a ravaged face from which her eyes, kind as her brother’s but faded to a milky blue, peered out at a bewildering world. The most universal and often the sole vanity of the country-woman is her instinctive horror of grey hair; obviously Florrie shared this aversion, but whereas others were content with modest browns and blacks, Florrie flaunted, above her ageing horse-face, a fuzzy coiffure of flaming henna-red.

She went swiftly over to Paul.

“But, really! An extra *half-crown*, Paul.” He merely looked at her uncomfortably but Johanna said, firmly:

"She has a long journey to come. She'll need a bicycle. If she weren't working here, she wouldn't need a bicycle. She will have to pay for it."

"Yes, yes," Florrie murmured. "That's reasonable. Isn't it, Paul? But you understand how it is, Johanna—we must be careful of every penny. I'm sure you disapprove of extravagant housekeeping quite as much as I do." She turned to Mary. "She looks a nice girl." In a pleased, surprised voice, she added: "She looks a very nice girl." She sighed. "It's so long since we've had a nice girl, isn't it, Paul? Or did we ever have one?" Almost pleadingly, she said to Mary: "I do hope you'll be happy here. The work isn't really so hard."

"I'm used to hard work," Mary said.

"I'll give you a hand all the time." Johanna coughed. "I took the pledge, Johanna, last week. Oh! yes, I know I took it before—once or twice," she said, vaguely, "but if I keep on long enough maybe some time, I'll keep it. Maybe this is the time," she said, hopefully.

"Maybe," said Johanna.

Florrie turned to Mary again.

"I drink, you know. I think it's better to tell you that at the start." Hastily she corrected herself. "I mean, I did drink."

"Plenty of people drink," Mary said.

"Yes, but mostly men, isn't it? People seem to disapprove of it more in a woman. They say it isn't womanly. Isn't it strange," said Florrie, thoughtfully, "that being womanly means pleasing men, but being manly doesn't at all mean pleasing women?"

"Not more strange than a lot of other conventions men have managed to foist on us," said Johanna. She nodded at Mary. "When do you want her to start?"

"Oh! as soon as possible. We have no one at present and I'm afraid I'm not a very good cook. Not a *very* good cook."

Mary found, to her relief, that her duties in the Darmody household were well within her capabilities. Within a week, she had the house scrubbed and shining. The cooking required was hardly more than she had been accustomed to at home; when she experimented, with the aid of a ragged *Mrs. Beaton* discovered under a tangle of dirt and rubbish in the drawer of the kitchen dresser, the results were received with surprise and admiration. By taking home a bundle of clothes each night for mending, the Darmodys' wardrobes were soon restored, Paul's to a threadbare, Florrie's to a gaudy, decency. And Florrie, now a self-righteous abstainer, was honourably lending the promised helping hand. Her efforts were, indeed, more of a hindrance than a help, but she was so anxious to please, so proud of her attempts, that Mary was very willing to let her work be retarded by Florrie's inexpert assistance, and to proffer the encouragement that Florrie's despondency so frequently required.

"For I am not," said Florrie, "a good housekeeper. No, I am not. It's no use denying it, Mary. I can see my own faults. I have tried to be, for Paul's sake. Not very often, of course, nor very much, because that unfortunate habit I had makes one careless and lazy. Though indeed," Florrie added, with vigour, "I don't think I was more careless or lazy than that string of hussies we've been cursed with for so many years. That's why it's such a joy to have you with us, Mary. You can't imagine how wonderful it is for me to watch Paul actually enjoying his meals and to see how nice he looks now that this suits

are properly cleaned and pressed. Don't you think he looks nice, Mary?"

"Yes," Mary said.

At least once a day, Florrie would enquire anxiously if Mary were happy and when Mary told her: "Yes," Florrie would beam and hum a little song around the house.

Very early in their acquaintanceship she had begged Mary to call her Florrie. But Mary was adamant in refusing. It wouldn't, she said, be correct.

"You are very correct, Mary, aren't you?" Florrie sighed. "Not," she said, hurriedly disclaiming any implied criticism, "that I don't like you that way. All the other ones we've had weren't correct at all. They stole or lied or had babies if they were young enough or were extra disagreeable if they weren't. So upsetting. Upsetting for Paul, too, though maybe he minded things less, because he's so absent-minded. That's because he's clever. Don't you think he's clever, Mary?"

"Yes," Mary said.

"You've seen the books he reads. Philosophy and history and economics. He *likes* them. And poetry too. And he likes sunsets and the sea and spring and that sort of thing. People don't understand when they blame him because his heart isn't in his business. How could it be? Could you," Florrie demanded fiercely, "have your heart in a public-house?" She swept on majestically. "Of course not! Nor could I. Oh! no doubt there are times—there *were* times, I mean—when I was interested in consuming what came out of it, but not in selling it. Paul gets so bored there in the bar—sometimes he's quite exhausted with boredom. People who drink too much are boring, you know—oh! very—and if they drink

at all they usually drink too much and then they always talk too much, which is worse. I can't help thinking any other trade would have suited Paul better. And then he won't keep open after hours and of course you lose custom in that way."

"Yes," Mary said.

"I remember when Paul was a little boy—such a charming little boy he was—he's a year or two younger than I, though you mightn't guess it—" Florrie touched her flaming hair coquettishly"—when he was a boy, he wanted to be all sorts of things. A poet, or an engineer, or a chemist. But of course he couldn't be. The business was there, and he was the only son. Father was a very successful publican. He drank himself to death. He was enormously popular. Drunkards always are, aren't they, in Ireland? At least," Florrie added, a trifle sadly, "male drunkards. I suppose it's because they make other people feel better by being a little worse themselves. Everyone said that Father was his own worst enemy. But then, if you're always fuddled, you're really not competent to be anyone else's, are you?" She shook her head sadly. "I'm afraid living with Father gave Paul a prejudice against the business. Which is unfortunate for the business though maybe good for Paul. It might have been better for me if I had been influenced to the same extent. But still," said Florrie, with a brisk, bright smile, "all that is past and gone now and, after all, I have my whole life before me yet."

She twitched her purple dress around her hips, patted her frizzled hair, and stared with pale, frightened eyes at deadly Time.

Mary's liking for Florrie had in it something of the aching protectiveness she had for her own family. Her

sympathy for Paul Darmody was tempered with an increasing admiration. After some weeks in his house, he was as kindly and politely distant with her as on the first day. She noticed, that in his contact with others he wore the same gentle air of reserve. Only with his sister did he emerge fully from whatever defensive world of his own in which he lived, and his fondness and solicitude for her were very evident. She returned his affection with a desperate intensity which depended on his strength and encouragement for all that was left of hope. She was always striving, and never failed, to win his praise for any efforts she made, even in such slight things as a well-darned sock or the cleaning of a room. And sometimes Mary would hear her say: "It's all right this time? You think things are all right this time, Paul?" and he would say: "Yes. All right now."

"For always, Paul?"

"Yes, Florrie. If you want it to be."

"I do. You know I do."

"Then it will be."

Florrie came in. She perched on the edge of the kitchen table, took a currant from the fruit that Mary had weighed for a suet pudding, held it between thumb and forefinger and began to nibble at it daintily. She said: "I'm worried."

Mary looked up from the mixing-bowl. Florrie's eyes were very bright and pale, her face was the colour of the chopped suet, blurred with a glistening damp.

"I'm very worried," Florrie said.

Mary said, slowly: "I'm sorry, Miss Darmody. If I could do anything to help——"

"Oh! no," Florrie said. "No. That's the trouble.

Nobody can." Sadly she regarded the half-eaten currant. "It's beyond help. It's beyond this world. It's Heaven."

Mary felt a small, sick fear wriggle in the pit of her stomach. The eyes staring at her were so pale, so bright. But she said, steadily enough: "If I were you, I don't think I'd worry about Heaven. I think unless we're very bad indeed we'll find we're all right. I think maybe nobody at all is too wicked to get there in the end."

Obviously Florrie needed no such platitudinous consolation. She sat upright and said, crossly: "It's not *getting* there that's worrying me. It's wondering whether I'll like it when I *do* get there. It's wondering," said Florrie, fiercely, and speaking in capital letters, "whether we are All Being Fooled."

Mary's simple and uninstructed faith searched wildly back to the parrot learning of her school days. Remembering, she said, with a sudden rush of relief: "'Eye hath not seen neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive—'"

Florrie interrupted with a sweeping wave of the hand. "I know it hath not, but why hath it not? We're told plenty about the Other Place," said Florrie, darkly. "Fire. Well, that's plain enough. Anybody would be anxious to keep out of fire. But we've got to take Heaven on trust. It's not," said Florrie, "Good Enough! There's no incentive to get there."

Mary was silent.

"Even the Mohammedans," said Florrie, who had evidently studied her subject only too well, "had more sense than we have. Their Heaven had plenty to eat, and plenty to drink, and beautiful women to hand whenever they wanted them. Which is very nice indeed, I suppose, if you're that kind of man. And the Mohamme-

dan women had no souls, so there was nothing to trouble them.” She paused. “But I wonder how did the beautiful women get to Heaven for the men, in that case?” She tilted her head thoughtfully. “Could it be that they were special female angels put aside for that purpose?”

Even in her bewilderment, Mary was aware of some flaw in this suggestion.

“H’m! We needn’t bother about all that, anyway—we’re not Mohammedans. And what have *we* to look forward to? All *we* can think of,” said Florrie, contemptuously, “is pearly gates and golden pavements and white robes and harps. Now, really, Mary is there anything very enticing in that?”

Mary said, weakly: “Some people might like those things.”

“Very few, I’m surc. The gates might look pretty, but walking on hard pavements is very tiring on the feet. And I do think men, anyway, always look better in pyjamas. And as for harps—!” Florrie sniffed. “So few people are musical and besides the harp is a poor instrument. Too tinkly.”

Needlessly stirring her pudding, Mary said: “I don’t think those descriptions are meant to be taken literally.”

“I know that. *He* was explicit enough about Hell, wasn’t *He*? But *He* hadn’t a word to say about Heaven. And do you know why?” She paused. She said, triumphantly: “Because Heaven isn’t really Very Much.” Suddenly she drooped dismally. “All last night I’ve been thinking and thinking about it. It’s terrible! I’ll be bored there. I know I will. Imagine being bored for all Eternity! Oh! Mary, do you think if I prayed and prayed *He*’d stop me being immortal? I couldn’t go on in Heaven for ever—I just couldn’t bear it.”

Mary looked longingly towards the door but Florrie was now walking up and down in front of it, wringing her hands.

"Early this morning—at twenty-three minutes past two, to be exact—I realised that Heaven isn't perfect. Oh! far from it! The proof flashed across me instantly. I wonder why no one thought of it before." Florrie stood still. She said, in a sepulchral voice: "If Heaven were perfect, then all the angels would have been perfectly happy there. But they weren't. They wanted more. And so Lucifer and his angels rebelled. And if angels," said poor Florrie, miserably, "couldn't be perfectly happy in Heaven, how on earth will *I* be happy there!" She sat down abruptly. "Get me a drink, Mary, there's a good girl! Medicinal, of course." She tittered. "That's not breaking the pledge. Oh! no, I shouldn't dream of doing that." She sighed. "But after a sleepless night, it's quite essential, I assure you."

"I'll ask Mr. Darmody."

"Oh! no, don't ask Paul! Paul is very, very selfish indeed at times. He doesn't understand. But I know you understand, Mary. You're a sensible girl. I merely require a small drink. Medicinal. You keep a little whisky in the kitchen for flavouring, don't you?"

"No."

"No!" Florrie was shocked. "You mean to say you never use whisky for flavouring?"

"No, Miss Darmody."

"Then *that's* what's wrong with your cooking. I knew there was just that little professional touch lacking, though I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was. My dear child, you should use whisky in everything."

"Yes, Miss Darmody."

"A suet pudding without a dash of whisky," said Florrie, "is like—is like—is a *bad* suet pudding. Run out now, dear, to the bar and ask Paul to give you a half-pint of whisky for the kitchen! Put a—a tablespoonful in the pudding and you'll find it will make all the difference in the world. A level tablespoonful, mind! I'm telling you the exact amount," Florrie said, airily, "because I shall probably not be here when you come back with the whisky."

When Mary told Paul, he said nothing for a moment. Then he asked, unemotionally: "Is she bad?"

"She's upset about Heaven."

He drew a deep breath. His face became tight with a shut look as if bracing himself for some dreaded effort.

"She must have got down here last night. I thought my keys were moved this morning. Do you think you could get her to bed, Mary? She'll be safer there."

With difficulty, Florrie was induced to retire with the promise of medicinal comfort when she was between the sheets. But even then she was reluctant.

"But I'm not ill, Mary. At least, ill enough for medicine, of course, but not ill enough for bed."

Firmly and truthfully, Mary said: "Even if you're only a little ill, Miss Darmody, it's better to be resting."

"Do you think so? To my mind, Mary, it's never right to generalise. Each individual case should be treated on its own merits. I imagine you will find the best medical opinions agree with me. Now as regards myself, Mary, what suits me best when I am unwell, is exercise. Exercise," said Florrie, largely, "plenty of it."

With these last words echoing horribly in her mind, Mary arrayed Florrie in her best nightgown. Careful of health as well as respectability, she insisted that Florrie

should retain her undervest. Then hopefully laying a dressing-gown—patched but clean—on a chair by the door, she felt she had done all she could.

But Florrie was in no mood to be left alone. Comfortably propped up with pillows, daintily and with lady-like grimaces sipping the whisky that Paul had provided, she yearned for company and conversation.

“Because, you see,” she said, “it’s all very difficult—very difficult indeed. One should Talk It Out. Don’t you find it helps a lot, Mary, to Talk It Out?”

Mary, who had never, in all her troubled life, allowed herself this indulgence, agreed. Over the rim of her glass, Florrie slanted a bright, pale eye.

“One starts with the most rigid convictions and then one finds one must compromise. That, really, is the secret of living; knowing when to compromise. But you’re too young to realise that yet, Mary. You’ll have to wait until you’re as old as I am.” She touched her hair. “Another few years. For example, take this!” She held out her glass and then hastily withdrew it in case her offer should be literally construed. “I sign the pledge. That seems simple enough, doesn’t it? But wait! What happens?”

“What?”

“Tut, tut, child! Haven’t you seen? I wouldn’t like to think you were stupid, Mary. Because you’re a nice girl,” Florrie explained, kindly, “and I’m fond of you. It would be *rather* a pity if you turned out stupid. Listen carefully now, Mary! My present situation is a perfect example—one could say a classic example—of what we were discussing.” She frowned. “What *were* we discussing?”

“About me being stupid.”

"Dear me, no, Mary! That was only a digression. But I'm afraid you are, a little, aren't you?" Florrie frowned again. "What was I talking about before that?"

"Would it be the pledge, Miss Darmody?"

"Yes, of course it would. Yes. As I was saying, I sign the pledge. I intend to keep it. Naturally. And then what happens? I get ill. And the one cure for me is the liquor that I have promised to renounce. ("That," said Florrie, in parenthesis, "was told me by a very wise old doctor in Dublin. A very wise man. It cost three guineas even to have him *look* at you. Mind you! I've nothing against Dr. Condon here, but he hasn't the *experience*.) So there I am, on the horns of a dilemma, as one might say. On the one horn, my pledged word. On the other horn, my sick body. And what decision do I come to? Do I break my pledge?"

Thankfully, Mary felt she could not go wrong here. She looked at the glass, half-empty now, and said: "Yes."

Florrie frowned more deeply than ever.

"Child, child! Think again! If I do not drink this—liquor, I commit suicide. In effect. Is that lawful?" Luckily she answered her own question before Mary could err again. "No. Therefore, so as not to commit suicide, I imbibe this distasteful—liquor," said Florrie, and did so, largely. "In a choice between two evils, one is bound to choose the lesser. It follows," Florrie concluded, with a simple enviable conviction, "that by so doing, I do *not* break my pledge. Is that quite clear?"

"Yes, Miss Darmody."

Florrie held out her glass with a brave invalid pathos. "In that case, I think I'll have a little more."

It was three weeks before Florrie, sick, bedraggled, cowed with the knowledge of one more battle fought and lost, was prepared again to submit any theological difficulties to the guidance of Father Healy. They had been three very difficult weeks for the household.

"But less difficult than usual," Paul said to Mary, "because of you."

There was still a shyness between them, but it was a friendly shyness. It could hardly be otherwise, considering the circumstances of the past weeks. Florrie could not be left unwatched for any time or she would slip down, a shaky but determined shadow, to the forbidden solace of the bar. Paul and Mary shared the duties of keeper during the day. When Paul, asleep at night with a racked weariness, had on several occasions, failed to hear the stealthy step creeping in the darkness past his door (He could not lock Florrie into her room at night. He had done this once, and she had opened the window and wakened all Kilmuc with her cries.) Mary had offered to live altogether at the Darmody's until the crisis was past and Paul had thankfully accepted. Together, with carefully diminishing quantities of whisky, they had nursed Florrie back to whatever remnants of health and sanity were normally hers. They were very tired.

Mary blushed now at Paul's remark. She said, quickly: "I only did what I had to do." She hesitated, flushed deeper, and said stumblingly: "I didn't mean that. What I meant was——"

Paul smiled.

"Don't try to tell me what you mean! You're not very good at it. Neither am I. What I wanted to say was: "Thank you!"

Unemotionally, Mary said: "I think Miss Darmody is all right again."

"She'll be all right now for awhile. You were very good to her, Mary; very gentle."

"I'm fond of her."

"Some of the others laughed at her. That was more horrible than anything else." Mary was silent. After a while, Paul spoke again. "Dr. Condon told me this time that she won't be able to stand many more of these bouts. Her heart isn't good." Unseeingly, he flicked over the pages of the book on his knee. "So I'm more grateful than you might have realised for the help you've given me with her."

Mary stared angrily at the back of his down-bent head. He was much too thin. And surely his hair was getting greyer. He should have someone who would look after him properly, someone who would see that he wasn't worried, and who'd make him eat his meals. For a moment, she almost hated poor inefficient, troublesome Florrie until she remembered how much worse it would be with no Florrie at all. For then he wouldn't even have the pathetic semblance of a home he had now, he'd have no one to care for, or who cared for him. No one.

Florrie drifted in. Her voice and manner were subdued, but her lips and cheeks and hair were brighter than ever. With a timid smile in answer to her brother's welcoming one, she sat down silently opposite him. Mary continued to set the table for the meal; Paul turned the pages of his book. Florrie fidgeted and coughed. Paul raised his head.

"Florrie!" he exclaimed and Mary started at the consternation in his voice.

The tears were streaming down Florrie's raddled

cheeks, making crooked runnels in the thick powder. Her lips quivered and wobbled; her shoulders shook. She cried as hopelessly and helplessly as an infant. Paul and Mary came to her, but she held them off with trembling hand.

"No, no! Let me cry! It's doing me good. I'm crying because I'm sorry. I'm really *very* sorry."

Mary knelt down beside her and laid an arm across the heaving shoulders.

"You're crying because you've been ill, Miss Darmody. Everybody does that. And it's not good for you at all. Please try to stop!"

"I haven't been ill. I've been drunk. Horribly, shamefully drunk. For days and days," said Florrie, wildly, "I've been like a hog, like a pig, like a—like a swine." Obviously her mind was fixed on the sty. "I'd be better dead. I'm ashamed to be alive. I'm ashamed to look either of you in the face. What kind of an example am I to a young girl like you, Mary? What kind of a sister am I to you, Paul?"

He said, gently: "You're the only sister I want, dear."

"You should have a wife, Paul. Only for me, you'd have had a wife and children long ago. But you couldn't because of me—because you have to look after me—because no sensible woman would come into this house with a creature like me in it. You should put me away somewhere," said Florrie, wringing her hands, "in whatever place they put creatures like me."

"I never," said Paul, slowly, "saw any woman for whose sake I would be without you, Florrie."

She blinked at him. She asked, solemnly: "Do you really and truly mean, Paul, that I've never been the

cause of preventing you from marrying anyone. Do you swear that, on your honour, Paul?"

"Yes."

"Then, of course," said Florrie, brightly, "*that's* a weight off my mind." She sniffed. "And, after all, we're very happy here together, aren't we, the three of us? You *are* happy here, aren't you, Mary?"

"Yes, Miss Darmody."

"And you're happy, aren't you, Paul? I mean, we've always been happy together but since Mary came, everything's been so much nicer. Always before we had a horrid extra person in the house, but now there's no extra person, just the three of us. Perhaps now that we're so happy, maybe I won't do *That* again. Indeed, probably I'll never do *That* again. All the same, in case by any chance I wanted to—oh! I know it's most improbable but still I think it's best to provide for every contingency—in case I wanted to, do you think, Mary—?"

"Yes, Miss Darmody?"

"Do you think you could be around somehow? I mean not go home at all at that time? You see, Paul has to attend to the business and can't be constantly with me but, if I felt the first faint signs of *That* coming on, I feel it would be a great help if you stayed with me all the time until the signs were safely over. We could go for little walks, maybe, and listen to the birds and look at the flowers and—and drink some nice, pure spring water."

"You got the Darmodys over that very nicely indeed," said Johanna.

Mary had come to thank her. The twins would leave

WE ARE SEVEN

for their respective schools, paying full fees and looking their fellow pupils squarely in the face from above the correct uniforms. But Johanna showed not the slightest interest in the twins.

"I never until now remember Florrie having a bout without making a public show of herself at least once. I must congratulate you, Mary."

"She wasn't so difficult to manage."

"No? You must be more strong-minded than you look. Do you manage Paul, too?"

Mary blushed, an annoying infirmity to which she had only lately become prone.

"I wouldn't try to. And I didn't really bully Florrie."

"Dear me, it's so difficult to know how to talk to you, Mary. At one moment, you're an old woman and at the next, you're a child. There, there!" said Johanna, comfortably, "of course, you're not a bully. You simply show people the right thing to do and see that they do it." She patted Mary's knee. "That man looks much better already. Not so much like a——" She paused deliberately. "—a starving mouse."

Mary's face and neck were burning hot.

"Everybody hasn't to be red and hulking and common. It's easy to be loud-voiced and throw your weight around. But if you're different from other people, then other people don't understand that you're better than they are. At least, maybe they do understand and that's why they get angry and pretend to look down on you."

Johanna's expression had something of the smug satisfaction of a purring cat.

"I'm afraid you're becoming a bit mixed, Mary—or I am. Who's looking down on who?"

Mary gulped.

W E . A R E S E V E N

"I like quiet people," she said, defiantly.

"Oh, is that what you've been trying to tell me? Well, I'm a quiet person," said Johanna, with a bland, false cat-mildness, "so we'll have a nice, quiet cup of tea together now in peace."

VI

A LITERARY Dubliner published a novel.

It was on the general level of mediocrity, below which it is undignified to fall, above which it is foolish to rise with any expectation of publication. It was dull enough to escape the fatal accusation of melodrama; it had that correctly jaundiced outlook which made it acceptable to the intellectuals, with sufficient safely oblique references to known personalities to ensure its circulation amongst a titillated, knowledgeable coterie. It had taken some time and trouble to write, but the author considered it should emphasise his cultural status for at least another ten years. It had a nicely modernistic wrapper.

The book was cautiously praised (to his face) by his friends (lessened now, alas! by the very fact of its production) ponderously and sadly damned by his rivals, each working on the infallible principle that another's failure contributed to his own success. The author was unfortunate in that his rivals had greater access to newspapers and periodicals than his friends, but this mischance was more than counterbalanced by his great good fortune in having a female relative working, at that period, in an English film studio. This charming girl drew the attention of the director to her cousin's book and he quickly perceived therein those qualities which would ensure financial and artistic success in a film.

With a cheque for two thousand pounds in his pocket and this final seal of approval stamped upon his talent, the lucky author held his head very high indeed in the envious city. His name had now become unassailably prominent, and his face became familiar even to the multitude, smiling from the newspaper illustrations as he welcomed the film unit—which included his loyal cousin who deservedly was to star in the part of the madcap Irish girl—at Dunlaoghaire, dined with them, wined with them, pointed out examples of interesting Georgian architecture to them, or merely sat with them, stood with them, or walked with them.

A number of scenes were shot in Dublin, and then it became necessary to select a suitable background for the quaint, early life of the wild Irish girl. Someone suggested the Waterford coast (it was late at night; the suggestion emanated from an alcoholically nostalgic recollection of a sunny morning's drive by a silken sea, with car and liver in perfect condition) and mentioned the village of Ballybay. (There had been a pleasant pub there, with a pleasant apple-cheeked woman and good whisky.) Ballybay was visited and pronounced suitable and finally the whole film unit moved towards the South.

Their arrival caused pleasurable consternation in Ballybay. Housing was strictly limited in and around the village but Ballybay families were eager and willing to sleep ten in a room to leave accommodation for the generous visitors. The less important members of the unit were thus provided for; the more important betook themselves to the hotels in Tramore and Waterford, from whence their cars would make little of the intervening distance.

The film Magnate had come at last. He wasn't merely a hopeful dream this time; he was really and truly there. The moment she heard the news Pansy dressed herself and Jennifer in their best, rubbed geranium petals to her cheeks and to Jennifer's, and set off to him.

Three miles on a hot summer's day is tiring for a small child but Pansy's pace never slackened. Only just outside Ballybay did she pause to take out pocket mirror and piece of broken comb, rearrange her hair, curl up her eyelashes with a moistened forefinger, and then she pressed on. She stopped the first man she met in the village.

"Where," she said, "are the picture people?"

To Pansy's surprise, the man regarded her with extreme disfavour. For the past three nights he had tried to sleep with six of his children, all under eight years of age, in his room, four of them actually in his bed. He was fond of his family but not so fond as all that. He had now an aching head and a general dislike of children.

"Those ones!" he said. He spat, almost at Pansy's feet. "They're all over the place," he said and slouched glumly by her.

Pansy stood stock still on the road. Then, hurriedly, she pulled out the mirror and took a reassuring glance. No, she looked all right; it wasn't that. She dismissed the oddly disagreeable person from her mind, gazed around (despite what he had said, there was no one in sight) and then walked determinedly towards the little post office.

There was a very old woman behind the counter. From her Pansy bought, with sixpence of Matthew Hogan's money, a bottle of lemonade and drank it in a doughty, exhausted fashion. She put down the empty bottle with a weak smile.

"That was very nice. I was very thirsty."

"It's thirsty kind of weather."

"I had a long walk," Pansy explained. "From Doon."

"From Doon? Now, who would you be, I wonder?"

"My name is Monaghan. Pansy Monaghan."

"Is that so, now?" The old woman's attention quickened. "Now, what Monaghans would you be? Would you be——?" She paused. "Would your mother's name be Bridget Monaghan?" she asked, delicately.

"Yes." Pansy saw that her questioner was eager for information and judged the moment opportune to move slowly towards the door. "I must be going. I came to look at the picture people and Mammy will be angry if I'm not back for tea."

"The picture people, is it? They're down by the slip—it's only round the turn of the street. You'll know when you're come to them easy enough by the crowd around them." The old woman sniffed contemptuously. Then, as Pansy neared the threshold, she said in desperation: "Won't you have another bottle of lemonade?"

Pansy's finger fondled the shilling in her pocket.

"I've no more money," she said, sadly.

She paid for her second bottle of lemonade with information—much of it erroneous but all of it apparently entralling to her listener—about herself and her family and then, sternly averting her eyes from jars of sweets and tins of biscuits, she made her way directly towards her goal.

A crowd of sightseers lined the wall above the little harbour. Pansy eel'd her way between knobby elbows and yielding sides, and looked down. The small bay was formed by a natural shelf of rock on one side and on the other by a concrete slip shelving down to the sea. On the crescent of hard yellow sand between, figures were

grouped in irregular formation and, to the right of them, Pansy saw, with one of her few impacts of genuine emotion, the cameras.

For fully quarter of an hour, she gazed in mute and selfless adoration. Then, realising that this was getting her nowhere, she began to look around.

It was difficult to know which was the Magnate. On such a hot day, he could not, unfortunately, be identified by his fur-collared coat. She narrowed her eyes, searching for a cigar, but nothing but cigarettes dangled from fingers or lips. The only thing to do was to go down and inquire. She removed her elbow from its nicely adjusted pressure on the hip of the woman nearest her and asked politely: "How do I get down to the strand, please?"

"Eh?" Freed from the sharp jab of Pansy's determined joint, the woman stirred comfortably and seemed to flow over her. "You can't go down there. No one's allowed down."

She settled herself in a better position, obliterating Pansy's view and almost smothering her. But, even as she had spoken, Pansy had noticed a small girl sitting alone on the edge of the rocks beside the beach. Where that child could go, Pansy Monaghan certainly could. Like a ruthless porcupine this time (for she disliked being smothered) Pansy went through the yielding crowd, leaving behind her a scatter of sore flesh and bone and muttered curses. She had a good sense of direction which did not fail her now. She went purposefully towards the right until she found herself alone on a grassy cliff-top, climbed down a perilous goat-path to a strip of shingle, turned to the left and scrambled over a belt of rocks (once she fell but, luckily, on top of Jennifer) and finally arrived, with only one small scratch on her

knee as a mark of her dangerous journey, by that child.

She sat down boldly beside the child. She looked at her. Mellowed by the successful conclusion of her enterprise, she said: "Hallo!" though, ordinarily, this was not at all the type of child to whom Pansy would deign to make advances. This little girl was dressed in a very ragged green skirt, with bare patches of skin showing through the holes in her ragged red jersey. Her fair hair hung down limply without clasp or ribbon. Her feet were bare.

She looked at Pansy and frowned. Pansy said: "Hallo!" again, more loudly but still kindly. The child turned her head away. She said, in a high, chill English accent: "What are you doing here?"

Pansy nearly fell off her rock into the pool below. She had heard this accent, often on the films, occasionally from the fox-hunting county hacking through Doon, and she knew what it connoted. She studied the surprising child more carefully. She noticed now that, despite the rags, there was no single speck of dirt visible and the untrammelled hair was sleek and gleaming. She said, cautiously: "I came to look on."

The strange child turned that imperious frown on her again.

"You can't stay here. Don't you know that nobody's supposed to come down here while they're shooting?"

"*You're* here," Pansy said.

The child laughed scornfully.

"I'm Maybella Merton." Pansy stared. The child said, very sharply: "Don't you know me?"

"No," Pansy said.

Maybella Merton shrugged her shoulders and looked wearily out to sea.

"Of course, there wouldn't *be* any films in a place like this."

"There are. At least, there are in Kilmuc. I often go there."

"Really?" The child raised her eyebrows. "And have you seen 'The Loaded Bough?'"

"I don't think so."

The child seemed unutterably bored.

"That was my latest."

For perhaps the first time in her life, Pansy was bereft of speech. At last she said, slowly: "Do you mean you *act* in pictures?"

"Naturally. I told you I was Maybella Merton."

There was a long silence. Maybella stared at the horizon and Pansy stared at Maybella. At last Pansy drew a deep breath.

"It's—it's wonderful to meet you."

With a faint semblance of interest, Maybella ceased studying the horizon.

"I suppose anything unusual is exciting in a place like this."

"Oh, no, not *anything*," Pansy said. "There are lots of unusual things that mightn't be a bit exciting. But meeting *you* is. Meeting a famous film star!"

Maybella was almost smirking now.

"You can't know much about me if you've never seen my films."

"Oh, but I do. Not seeing your films—not yet—but reading all about you. In the magazines. They said you were wonderful and very famous. I just didn't catch your name the first time you said it," Pansy explained, glibly, "but of course I know all about you. Even to look at you, anyone would know you were famous."

Maybella smirked outright.

"I suppose I *am* fairly well known."

Pansy ploughed on.

"Of course, you're well known. Everywhere. Probably now you thought that an ordinary child like me mightn't have heard of you, but you see I have. We've often talked of you at home," said Pansy, feeling that the creature was insatiable, "looking at pictures of you and—that sort of thing. Often and often." Pansy paused and sighed. She waited for a moment and then asked, meekly: "Would it matter if I stayed here? Just keeping quiet, you know. Just to be with you."

"It will probably be all right. I shouldn't think they'll get around to my scenes today."

With a sigh of relief, Pansy relaxed. She wriggled to a less spiky position on the rock and settled Jennifer beside her. Secure and at ease, she scanned the intermingling and apparently chaotic company on the beach, so near now that she could distinguish the players by their peculiarly painted faces. But she couldn't find the Magnate. She had to ask Maybella.

"Who's making this picture, Maybella?"

"How do you mean, making it? All of us, of course."

"But who's the head one?"

"Do you mean Alan Horton? He's over there!"

Mr. Horton was talking earnestly to a girl dressed in a green shawl and red skirt, almost as tattered as Maybella's, and a fat little priest, whose round hat was pushed to the back of his head. All three were gesticulating freely with cigarettes. Mr. Horton wore a khaki shirt, brown corduroy trousers and sandals. He was a small man and looked worried. Pansy felt a vague sense of disappoint-

ment and loss. But there, such as he was, was the Magnate, and she fixed him with a vulture eye.

"I," said Maybella, "am playing her when she's young."

She pointed to the green-shawled girl.

"Oh! Is that why your clothes are torn, too?"

"We're fisher folk."

Pansy had never seen any fishermen's families dressed in such slattern brightness. She said, earnestly: "It seems queer you not mending your clothes when you're her. She'd be old enough to mend her clothes. And even her when she's you would have a mother or someone to mend them."

Maybella shrugged her shoulders.

"Irish, you know."

Pansy felt worried.

"But I'm Irish and—"

"Sh-h-h!" said Maybella, fiercely. "They're making a take."

The crowd had withdrawn from the girl and the priest, leaving them standing together by a beached boat. The girl sprang into the boat and out again. She was very wild. She looked passionately at the sea and made a speech that Pansy could not hear. The priest backed a pace, took off his round hat and made a sweeping sign of the cross on himself. The girl tossed her head in a mad-cap fashion and flung out her arms.

"Och! yer riverince," she said, loudly enough now for Pansy to catch the words, "'tis how I must be going towards the bright lights beyant. 'Tis afther dyin' I'd be," said the headstrong girl, "an' I to be stayin' any longer here bc the waves an' the lonely places." She dropped to her knees. "Let you be afther givin' me yer

blessin', yer riverince, an' I to be settin' out on me way!"

The obliging clergyman gave her a generous blessing and then all the people on the strand surged together again.

Maybella yawned.

"They've done that three times already. They'll probably keep on at it all afternoon. She's not much good, really."

Pansy knew it was safe to agree whole-heartedly.

"They've queer voices."

"Irish," said Maybella.

"Why did she call him 'yer riverince'?" Pansy asked, vastly puzzled by this novel form of address.

"Irish, of course."

"Oh!" Pansy hesitated. "And why did he bless himself so big?"

"You ought to know. Aren't you a Roman?"

Pansy swelled with pride. She had heard Sissy and Willie discussing the Romans. Some were Emperors and some fought on bridges and they were all very noble. Obviously, because of her smart and fashionable condition, Maybella, with her odd preconceptions, had mistaken her nationality. She said: "Well, 'smatter of fact, I am, but—'"

Maybella reached over and pulled Jennifer from her obscure position.

"Your doll is nicely dressed. Matches you, doesn't she?" She tilted her head. "It seems rather a waste to bother dressing-up such an old doll, though, doesn't it?"

"All my new dolls," said Pansy, brilliantly, "are well dressed already. I just thought I'd give that old one an outing." A beautifully applicable phrase from a song she had heard came to her. "For old time's sake."

"I know." Maybella looked sentimental. "I have a favourite old doll, too. Very old."

"I thought you'd have so many dolls, you wouldn't have any favourite ones."

"I'm a very simple child," Maybella said, angrily. "I average eighty pounds a week, less income tax, and I only get half-a-crown for pocket money. That's how simple I am."

Privately, Pansy, whose weekly income from a reluctant parent now far exceeded this, thought it very simple indeed. She watched Maybella languidly dandling Jennifer. At last she said, without a single maternal pang: "You can keep my doll, if you like."

"No, thank you!" Coldly Maybella replaced Jennifer on the rock. "She's rather *too* old."

Pansy longed to hit her. Instead she said, in a small, simpering voice: "I'd love to see *you* acting."

"You may tomorrow, if they don't have too many retakes."

"Oh! Will you be here again tomorrow? Here on the rocks? And can I sit with you again tomorrow?"

"Yes," said Maybella, graciously, "if you keep quiet."

"I'll keep quiet. I did today, didn't I? And I'll bring sweets. What kind of sweets do you like?"

Maybella looked angry again.

"I'm not allowed sweets except two before I brush my teeth at night. *They* say they're bad for my teeth."

Pansy hesitated.

"If," she began, at length, feeling her way, "if you were allowed to eat the sweets I'll bring tomorrow, what kind would you like?"

"I like chocolates best. Ones with jelly inside and pink cream."

"Those are the kind I'll be bringing tomorrow." The cameras on the beach were being dismantled now. Pansy stood up to go. "Would there be a place for another child in this picture?" she asked, casually.

"Of course not. I'm the only child in it."

"I see."

Pansy gave her a strange, dark look.

Half a mile beyond Ballybay, a bread van overtook her. She looked so small and lost that the driver gave her a lift to the turn of the road near her home. She hardly spoke to him at all, apart from thanking him, politely, if absent-mindedly, as she got out. She was too busy thinking to talk.

She was up very early next morning. She set out at once for Kilmuc and was again fortunate in getting a lift, this time in a creamery cart. She made straight for Darmody's, where Mary opened the door to her. Mary was surprised, and rather alarmed, at this unexpected visit of her small sister.

"What brings you here, love? Nothing wrong at home, is there?"

"No. At least, not 'xactly wrong. But Tommy's bike got broken and he has to get it mended and he sent me for a loan of yours until his is fixed because you won't be wanting it these days when you're staying here altogether for the present." Pansy drew a much-needed breath. "Please, he said."

Sedately, she wheeled off Mary's new bicycle, nodding her head gravely at reiterated admonitions not to cycle on it herself on the main road.

"Because you know, love, when your legs aren't long enough to let you sit on the saddle, you can't have any

proper balance. So you will promise me not to cycle, won't you?"

"I promise," Pansy said. "Beside," she added, virtuously, "even if you hadn't told me, I wouldn't have cycled. I'd be afraid something might happen to your lovely new bike."

Her incorrigibly foolish sister kissed and hugged her.

"And you'll go straight home, won't you, love? You won't—you won't go talking to anyone in Kilmuc?"

Pansy looked wistfully hurt at this oblique reference to Matthew Hogan.

"Of course I'll go straight home. I promised Nammy."

Luckily, for she had a wholesome respect for Johanna, she found Matthew Hogan outside his house, enjoying the morning sun. She put herself quickly between him and the sanctuary of his home. She said: "I want a pound."

A pang assailed Matthew's vitals. His comfortably digesting breakfast suddenly heaved and churned in his stomach. Even Pansy's indomitable soul quailed before the terrifying impact of his hate.

"I must have it," she said, hurriedly. "Only this time." Still he continued to glare at her. "I won't want any more for a long time. I'll probably never want any more." He gave a short horrid laugh. Pansy's eyes widened in despair. She had realised the risk of breaking her compact by accosting him here, but the imperative need for money left her no choice. "Probably I won't be here to want it any more." Matthew's countenance made it only too plainly obvious that her words carried no conviction. She looked up to heaven for inspiration and found it there. "Because I'll probably be dead."

"If I had my way," said Matthew, fiercely but most illogically, "you'd never have been born."

He laughed that bitter, snorting laugh again and turned on his heel and Pansy knew she was seeing the turning worm. She grabbed at his coat-tails.

"When I'm dead, you'll be sorry you weren't nice to me. Everybody is nice to me now. That's because," said Pansy, suddenly feeling very delicate, "I haven't long to live." She recollected the exciting preliminaries to the death of a neighbour in Doon. "I'm spitting blood."

Matthew halted.

"You're—*what*?"

"Spitting blood," said Pansy, rapidly, "I spit a lot of it. That's why I won't be able to ask you for any more money even if I wanted to because I'm going away to hospital tomorrow. For years and years—only probably I'll die first. It's a special kind of hospital with a different name that I can't remember. Sanitation or something." Matthew was looking down on her with a growing conviction in his face. "If you like," she offered, hopefully, "I'll spit some blood for you now."

"You needn't."

"No, I guessed you wouldn't like me to. It doesn't look nice, of course. I have to cough first. I cough and cough and then I spit and spit."

She gave a small hollow cough.

"You needn't cough here," Matthew said, sharply.

"I didn't want to. I had to." She paused. "Will you give me the pound now? I just wouldn't like to be without money in the sanitation."

Matthew had his hand in his pocket.

"When are you going to the sanatorium?"

“Tomorrow.”

“You’ve kept it very quiet until now, haven’t you?”

“Yes.” The Monaghan’s neighbour had also kept it quiet, too quiet for her ultimate safety. “That’s because we didn’t want me to go away.”

Pansy had added the final touch of authenticity. With a different, and even more unpleasant, laugh, Matthew pulled out a pound note and handed it to his wide-eyed daughter.

“So this is the last little present I’ll be giving you, eh?”

“Yes. Unless you’ll send me something to the sanitation.”

“I won’t.”

“Probably it wouldn’t be worth while. Probably this will last me out, anyway.” Pansy was feeling very ill indeed. She was pale and barely able to stand. She managed a weak, sad smile. “Won’t you say goodbye to me—dadda?”

“I told you not to——”

“It’s because it’s the last time.” If Pansy had a fault, it was that she was tempted unduly to prolong a situation. “Until we meet in Heaven.” Again she gazed at the cloudless sky. She knew how to end this little scene; she had noted the pathetic conclusion of a similar episode in Kilmuc’s Regal cinema last week. “Sometimes—I’m frightened—of dying.”

“If I were you,” said Matthew, callously but sincerely, “I’d be thoroughly frightened, too,” and left her.

It took Pansy some moments to readjust herself. She clung weakly to the bicycle under the shadow of the Great Wing. At length her feet, in their white socks and neat shoes, were steady once more on the solid pavement,

and she moved off in the direction of Bates's. She was very thoughtful. She realised that she had finally burnt her bridges in regard to Matthew but she was a brave child and ready to stake her all, represented by this indubitably final instalment of blood-money, on the chance of the glorious future.

William Bates never gave a glad reception to any of the Monaghans but he kept the best chocolates. Pansy bought two pound boxes of the most expensive, which took fourteen of her last twenty shillings, tied her parcel carefully to the bicycle carrier and set out for home with all her business expeditiously concluded.

She carried in her parcel secretly. She did not attempt to conceal the bicycle but told her mother that Mary, having no immediate use for it, had lent it, "because," said Pansy, "she thought I'd be tired doing messages," and her trusting mother nodded and smiled.

Then Pansy went to dress. This took a long time. She found a blue jersey of Tommy's, in fair condition but shrunk too small for him and thus carefully darned and washed and laid aside for Willie, and Sissy's white Confirmation dress, also laid aside to await Pansy's reception of that grave sacrament. She cut holes in these garments and put them on, the jersey over the dress. The effect was good, but the feet were still wrong. She took off her socks, scratched the uppers of her shoes against the soles and rubbed ashes well into them. Nothing remained now but to pull off her hair ribbon and comb her hair down over her right eye. She gazed critically at the final result in the mirror and was satisfied. She looked Irish. Not so Irish as Maybella, but Irish, all the same.

Jennifer's toilet presented what seemed insurmountable difficulties. It was obviously impossible, at such short

notice, to have a matching Irish Jennifer. Pansy considered leaving her behind, but she had carried the troublesome doll so long and faithfully that Jennifer had become a habit and Pansy felt incomplete without her. Finally, with that happy inspiration which never failed her, she stripped Jennifer naked and decided that the battered canvas body, with fantastically lolling limbs denuded of any exterior support, looked quite Irish enough.

Now she was correctly attired, she had what would surely prove an irresistible bait for Maybella, she had a means of swift and easy transport. She went on her way.

Maybella finished all the soft chocolates, leaving the toffees and the stony centres for Pansy. Pansy chewed and crunched, grimly pleased.

“I’m bringing another box tomorrow.”

“Are you?” Maybella was torpid with the effects of over three-quarters of a pound of greedily swallowed chocolate. “I expect I’ll be busy all day tomorrow. They’ve got to get my scenes finished, because I’m due back in London next week. I’ve only been lent to this crowd.”

Valiantly Pansy continued to do her nauseating best.

“Probably your own crowd—the ones that lent you—are much better than these?”

“My dear!” said Maybella. “What do you think!”

She took up a toffee, bit it tentatively, wrinkled her nose and threw the toffee away. With an unrestrainable yelp of anguish, Pansy saw it plop into the sea. She gave a hollow cough. Instantly, Maybella edged away from her.

“Have you got a cold? Because if you have, you must

go away. I catch colds very easily'. Even if I get my feet wet, I catch a cold. I have to be very, very careful," said Maybella, solemnly, "because I'm not very strong."

"I haven't a cold but I'm not strong either. I spit blood."

"Anyone can do that. I did, at Christmas, when my tooth fell out."

But Pansy had resigned from this competitive frailty. She was meditating.

"It's a pity you're not strong. Probably if you got wet all over, you'd get a bad cold. Probably then," said Pansy, slowly, "you wouldn't be able to do what you have to do in this picture, would you?"

"My dear! I certainly wouldn't. I'd just *die*!"

"Tomorrow," said Pansy, "I'll be bringing special kind of sweets. They're a new kind. Special. I'll be here early tomorrow. There's a lovely place along the rocks that I want to show you. A place with a pool of coloured fish. Special place. I'll bring you there tomorrow and you can look at the fish and eat the special sweets."

At the moment, Maybella was too full of chocolate to respond enthusiastically to this lure.

"I'll be working tomorrow."

"I'll come early. The fish are most 'strordinary in that pool. Red and green and—'" Fortunately, caution prevailed. "Well, 'strordinary fish."

Maybella poked Jennifer disgustedly.

"She looks horrible like that."

"She's sun-bathing. It's good for her."

Maybella said nothing. She looked at Pansy's carefully tattered garments. It was only too obvious that she approved neither of Pansy nor her doll today. It was

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also obvious that she was bored. She stood up and yawned.

“I must go now. They’ll be wanting me soon.”

As she strolled off, Pansy called after her. .

“But you’ll be here tomorrow?”

“Perhaps.”

A stony Medusa, Pansy sat on her rock and watched the innocent Maybella perform before the cameras. Maybella ran light-heartedly across the strand, paddled ankle-deep in the waveless tide (and here the proceedings had to be halted while her feet were carefully dried by a woman in a black linen coat and skirt) jumped in and out of the boat (apparently the Irish heroine had formed the habit young) and spoke in that peculiar accent. She did nothing that Pansy could not have done better.

Pansy was, within limits, a kind child. She would not willingly choose harsh methods if easier would prevail. As the cameras were being packed up, she walked boldly across the strand to where the fussy man in the corduroy trousers and sandals was giving some loud-voiced instructions for tomorrow and addressed him directly.

“Can I act in this picture?”

He took no notice of her. Nobody took any notice of her.

“I can act as well as Maybella. I can act better. Everyone says I can.”

The voices went on uninterruptedly above her. She stood still, while a slow rage mounted in her, and then she grabbed him by the shirt and tugged.

“Can I act in your picture?”

He uttered an old English word, very common in Doon.

“It’s bad enough being in the —ing mess we’re in

without having the ——ing natives pinching bits out of me! Here, you, clear off to Hell!"

Pansy's injured pride almost induced her to leave his shilling lying where he had flung it.

She left the house next morning before anyone else was awake. She carried an empty box, neatly wrapped in brown paper. There was no more need to waste luxuries on Maybella.

She had been waiting for two hours before Maybella joined her. She led the way over the rocks out towards the sea, with her victim scrambling awkwardly in her wake. Several times the grumbling Maybella faltered and stopped but Pansy urged her on until they were safely hidden away together, with quarter of a mile of sheltering rocks behind them, the empty ocean in front, and a deep pool at their feet.

"There!" said Pansy, and pointed downwards.

Maybella was very hot and very tired. Peevishly, she looked at the black, seaweed-fringed depths.

"I don't see any fish."

"They're hidden by the seaweed. Throw this stone in and lean over!"

Maybella threw the stone in and leaned over and Pansy pushed her into the pool.

Never, even in her most justly irritated moments, had Pansy intended Maybella to drown, but this is what Maybella appeared to be doing. The pool, although narrow, was four and a half feet in the centre to Maybella's four, and Pansy's strength and endurance were well tested before Maybella was out on the rocks again, choking and gasping and crying.

Pansy regarded her with satisfaction. She was thor-

oughly wet, inside 'and out. She was sick, too. Pansy sat and watched but at last even this spectacle began to pall.

"We'd better go back."

Maybella gasped and wailed.

"I can't move. I'm dying. You murdered me."

"I saved you," Pansy said, indignantly.

"You pushed me in."

"I slipped. Anyone could slip. These are very slippy rocks."

Maybella uttered a strangled shriek of pure anguish.

"I'm cold. I'm dying."

"So am I cold. I got all wet from saving you. Any ordinary polite person would be thanking me for saving your life." She paused but Maybella showed no disposition towards gratitude. "*I'm* going back, anyway, and you can stay here if you like."

She began to clamber away from the wretched Maybella, who, appalled by the prospect of being left to die, alone and marooned, shrieked louder than ever. But Pansy was tired of her. She kept on, giving only one backward glance to see Maybella in the distance crawling weakly after her.

The strand was crowded and the confusion was even worse than usual. The woman in the black coat and skirt was rushing around, shrieking almost as loudly as Maybella.

"She came down here. I know she did. She said she wanted to look at the sea."

"If you're looking for Maybella, she's over there." Pansy pointed at the rocks. "She fell into a pool." She paused. "I pulled her out."

But no one thanked her this time either. Everyone

spoke together and ran around and shouted until at last Maybella was carried into their midst, clinging to the woman in black.

“I was drowning, Momma. She tried to drown me.”

“Yes, yes; darling. You’re all right now.”

Pansy stood squarely.

“I pulled her out.”

“She—she pushed——”

Maybella choked and gurgled. Then she suddenly fell silent and began slowly to turn blue. The woman in black swung around to Mr. Horton and spoke in a clipped, crisp voice.

“I’m taking her straight home. We’ll get a plane from Dublin.”

“But, good God! you can’t——”

“She must be under Dr. Denvan’s care immediately. She’s in for one of her bad attacks of asthma.”

“But, good God, woman! Don’t fuss! Can’t you get a doctor here? Maybe she’ll be all right tomorrow.”

“It will be at least two weeks before the child is able to work. *If* she escapes pneumonia.”

“But, look here, Mrs. Merton——”

“And if you’re thinking of your picture,” said Maybella’s mother, viciously, “it couldn’t be worse than it is, could it? And it certainly would have added nothing to Maybella’s reputation.”

Equally viciously, Mr. Horton said: “Your contract!”

“Act of God,” said Mrs. Merton, and, blue and silent, Maybella was borne away.

There was a deadly quiet.

“That’s torn it!” said Mr. Horton. With an awful calm, he lit a cigarette. “What do we do now, boys and girls? Pack up and go home?”

WE ARE SEVEN

There was a babble of suggestions. Then someone said: "But, really I mean to say, couldn't we get a brat somewhere?"

"Who?"

Nobody seemed to know. But someone else suggested, feebly: "Well, couldn't we *try* the agencies?"

Mr. Horton was apparently engrossed in the delicate shades of smoke curling from his cigarette tip.

"We're supposed to be back to do the London sequences on Tuesday," he said, still with that terrifying calm. "We had three days to take that kid's scenes. Are we supposed to stay on here in this god-forsaken spot, sitting on our bums, while the agencies are being scoured? —! —! —!" roared Mr. Horton and threw away his cigarette.

"I knew this place was unlucky," said a long-haired man. "As soon as we arrived, I felt it. The aura—"

"Aw!" said Mr. Horton and made a very rude remark.

Pansy judged the moment opportune to come forward. She said, in a polite, distinct voice: "If you want a child, wouldn't I do?"

"For Chrissake!" said Mr. Horton. "It's the little — that pinched me yesterday." His eyes flashed with joy at this legitimate and very small object on which to vent his fury. "Clear away to Hell, you little so-and-so!"

"I can act," said Pansy. "I can act very well. I can do everything that poor Maybella does."

Without giving him time to reply, she proceeded to prove it. She jumped in and out of the boat. She ran to the sea and splashed there, laughing. She came to the priest and said, wistfully: "It's how I'm sad to think that mebbe one day I'll not be wantin' to run and play no more but mebbe be quiet like an' old." (Pansy had an excellent memory.) "Would you say that the angels

are quiet, or would there be small ones like me that might be afther wantin' to play, too?" For good measure, she added: "Yer riverince!"

Because they had nothing else to do, they had watched her. And now Mr. Horton lit another cigarette, and said, slowly, while Pansy stood in front of him with her hands tightly clasped on Jennifer, her heart throbbing and all the sincerity she had in her wide anxious eyes: "I don't see that she's any worse than the other."

There was a relieved murmur of agreement.

"A damn' pretty kid."

"Voice all right, too."

"The other," said the long-haired man, "was a bitch. So is her mother."

"You know, it might be an idea." Mr. Horton was musing, staring through Pansy as if she were invisible. "Film unit discovers new child actress." Hastily he corrected himself. "Well-known director discovers new child actress. From the lonely little village of Ballybay on the barren Atlantic-swept Waterford coast, a new light has shone on the film horizon. A simple little colleen—and all the rest of that piffle. Might give the thing a boost—and God knows it needs it! Besides," he said and frowned in a puzzled way at Pansy, "she's not bad. At least I suppose she *is*, but it doesn't hit you in the eye. Since we're stuck anyway, there's no harm in trying her out. We can run it through tonight and then decide what to do. And she's not *bad*." He wheeled around. "Well, chaps, what are we waiting for?"

Pansy spent a busy day. At the end of it, she was driven home in the Magnate's car by the Magnate himself. She talked to him all through the short journey. He said

little, but looked at her very often. She led him confidently into her house and presented him to her bewildered mother. He was very polite and kind and patient with Bridget Monaghan though it took her unduly long to grasp the significance of what had occurred. Before he left, he gave her a five-pound note.

"If we use Pansy for the next few days, that will be another ten pounds. Will that be all right?"

Bridget Monaghan could only nod a weak assent.

"Of course, we can't know until we run her scenes through. If the result is satisfactory, I'll call for her at nine tomorrow morning."

Pansy ushered him to the door.

"I'll be ready at nine. I'm very punctual."

"But you understand, don't you, Pansy, that——"

"I'll be ready at nine," Pansy said calmly.

He looked at her again with that queer puzzled frown and laughed.

"By God! you know," he said, "maybe I've got something, at last. Maybe I have!"

Out of the overflowing gladness of her heart, Pansy shared the box of chocolates that had been spared from Maybella with her family. That night she slept the dreamless sleep of the successful unjust. At nine o'clock she and Jennifer were at the gate when the car arrived.

VII

WHILE Mary was away from home, Toughy's freedom was untrammelled. His mother was unperturbed by his absences, though always pleased at his return, and Sissy's futile, conscientious efforts at control he despised in a kindly, manly fashion.

Roaming the countryside at will, he grew tougher and more dangerous than ever. He went always armed now against the possible perils of his wide travelling. Tommy's discarded penknife was rusty and the tip of the blade was broken off but, sharpened on a stone and with good muscle behind it, it was a deadly weapon.

One morning, when he was feeling even better and braver than usual, he resolved on an expedition he had long contemplated. He put his knife in his pocket, hitched up his dungarees, scowled and set off.

He was going to the house of the man with the bull.

When at length he came to the animal's field, he passed by coldly without a second glance, his gaze fixed on the house not far away. It was even lovelier than he had remembered. The roof shone like honey under the sun and great masses of crimson roses were splashed like jam on the white walls. It was a pity that the man who owned it wasn't friendly but he couldn't object to a fellow standing on the road and looking at his house. A fellow had a right to stand on the road.

Toughy stood on the road and defiantly gazed his fill.

The house had a big glass porch where clumps of strange purple berries hung between wide pale leaves. It had two tall windows on either side of the porch that were more like doors than windows and they were all open. In front of the house was a beautiful garden of grass and flowers. Bushes grew there, too, and along a clipped hedge of fuchsia were three bee-hives, with the bees buzzing wildly about the dangling bells or flying far off under the sky.

Toughy was very interested in the bees. He climbed up the green wooden gate to study them but he was still too distant to see them crawl in and out of their houses as he longed to do. He glanced cautiously around. There was no one on the paths, no one at the gleaming windows, no voice but the hum of the bees. He climbed down into the beautiful garden.

The bees were most engrossing. He watched for a long time, hoping to see a collision between the fussy outgoing and incoming insects, but none occurred and, when this orderly activity began to pall, he wandered about the little curving paths that ran from the main straight gravelled path, touching the bright flowers, burying his nose in them to smell the sweet sun-drawn perfume but never injuring or pulling one single blossom. As he wandered, so his caution lessened until finally he was standing beside a window. He paused then. He wanted very much to look in. He glanced at the gate. He would take one quick look and then go straight back to the road again. He put his hands on the low sill and leaned his head and shoulders into the room.

The two windows on this side belonged to one room.

It was a lovely room, as lovely as the house and garden. The brown wallpaper had lines of cabbage-shaped flowers of darker brown and pink, where red butterflies and birds perched comfortably. There were more big flowers, blue ones, on the red linoleum. In the centre of the room was a table covered with a red plush cloth with tasselled gilt fringe and a similar cloth was on the mantelpiece. Four straight chairs were ranged around the table and beyond was a black shiny sofa. There was a lot to see in this room. Toughy's glance flitted rapidly from the lace curtains, looped with bows of wide pink ribbon, to the small pedestal holding a red geranium in a brass pot, the many photographs on the walls, the picture of the Pope over the fireplace, the crinkly blue paper in the grate, and then a door in the opposite wall opened and a woman came into the room.

She was a tall, thin woman with dark hair and a pale face. She wore a dark dress and overall. She did not at all seem to belong to the house or the garden or the room. Toughy and she stared at each other. The woman said: "What are you doing here?"

"Looking in," Toughy said.

The woman went out, closing the door behind her. Toughy waited. He had only once in his life run from danger, but even men ran from bulls. The woman came out from the porch and walked swiftly over to him. She looked down at him. Her pale face became paler. She said, hoarsely: "What is your name?"

"Toughy."

"What is your other name?"

"I'm Toughy Monaghan." A little of his swagger returned. "Everyone knows me."

"I have no doubt. What brings you here?"

"I wanted to see the house. I jus' meant to stand on the road and look at the house. It was the bees." Toughy realised now that it was altogether the bees who were to blame. "I wanted to see how they went in and out their doors and I couldn't from the gate. So I came in to look. And then when I was here I thought I might as well look in at the house, too. If the bees had been nearer," said Toughy, aggrievedly, "I wouldn't have come in at all."

"Why did you want to see the house?"

"It's a nice house. I came specially to see it."

"Who told you to come? Your mother?"

"Nobody tells me to do things—I jus' do them. I came because I liked the house."

The woman's face bent lower to him.

"Have you seen it before?"

"Me an' a man saved Rough from a bull. The man said this was his house and he was bringing me here to give me food. Cake, I expect. Then he got cross and told me to go away."

"He was quite right." The woman's pale face was on a level with his, her dark eyes stared into his round blue eyes. "Nobody wants you here. Keep away from this house! Do you understand me? Go away at once and don't ever dare to come back!"

He backed away from the crouching witch-woman. He put his hand in his pocket and gripped his knife. It gave him a little much-needed courage. He reminded himself that he was Toughy Monaghan and no one could make him cry.

"I'll go," he said. "I wouldn't want to stay here." The woman stood, erect and silent. He turned towards the gate. "Mostly," he said, over his shoulder, not

boasting but merely making a plain statement of fact, "people like me."

"I don't like you. Nobody in this house likes you."

Toughy walked on. The garden was one blurred mist of colour. The gate was very far away. He was frightened; he wanted to be at home. He kept his head high and held his knife and tried to see through the blinding mist. He banged against something, fumbled with shaking hands and knew it was the gate. Unsteadily he began to climb. At the top, he groped with one leg for unseen support, unbalanced and fell back on to the gravelled path on his hands and knees. He stayed motionless for a moment, sick with the burning pain that seared up through his arms and thighs. There was a sound of swift steps on the gravel and when he sat up and rubbed his eyes, the woman was standing over him.

She said: "Are you hurt?"

Toughy looked. His knees and his palms were messes of raw skin and blood, embedded with tiny stones. It was a horrid sight. He had never had so much difficulty in remembering he was Toughy Monaghan. He drew a deep breath.

"No."

"Don't be silly!" she said, angrily. "Why didn't you open the gate? You're a very stupid little boy!"

She was a stupid woman.

"I *never* open gates." Toughy frowned. "Why didn't you come out the window instead of going around to the door? If I lived in this house," said Toughy, conversational even in the extreme of misery, "I'd never use that door. Because what is the good of having those sort of windows if yo': do?"

Gingerly he moved one leg. It hurt. He kept on

sitting, wishing she would go away and let him alone. But instead she said: "You'd better come in and wash your hands and knees."

"No."

"You can't walk home like that."

"I can."

"You must wash that dirt and gravel out quickly."

"I like dirt and gravel. I like blood, too," Toughy lied, watching it ooze and flow and smear. "If you go away, I'll go home. I can't go home if you keep standing there."

Ellen Power was strung to the highest tension of nervous exasperation. She looked down at the dirty blood-streaked face looking up at her. Round, slow tears were rolling down the cheeks but the quivering lips were pressed tightly together. At that moment, she could not hate her husband's son. She said, with the first touch of gentleness she had used to him: "I'll clean you up and then you'll be able to walk home fine."

He sat, stubborn and immovable.

"I can walk now."

Distractedly, Ellen said: "You can't. You——." The blue eyes glared at her. She pushed her hair back from her forehead. He was so small that it would be easy to pick him up and carry him in, so aggrievedly dignified that it was impossible. She said, slowly: "I'm sure you could, but it wouldn't be sensible. When the men get hurt, they always get themselves cleaned up straight off. Even when they're only a little hurt, not half as badly as you. Because it's sensible."

"You mean like not annoying bulls?"

"Yes, like that." Ellen had a flash of inspiration. "And you can come in by the window."

Toughy got to his feet. He took one wincing step forward and stopped.

“Mind you, I’m not crying!”

“I don’t suppose you ever cry.”

“Not since I was young. Maybe,” said Toughy, hobbling along beside her, “I might have cried then. Young children usually do. But I think it’s instead of talking so it’s not really crying.”

To his great disappointment, it was impossible for him to enter by one of those delightful windows. His knees were too stiff and painful. But she brought him into the lovely room and sat him down on the shiny, slippery sofa and got a basin of water and a bottle and began to bathe his wounds. This hurt very much indeed. It was necessary to impress on her again that he was not crying.

“I expect it’s that stinging stuff in the bottle. Not that I mind the stinging, but I expect it’s like onions.”

“Yes,” she said, “it’s like onions” and he was comforted to see that there were tears in her eyes too.

It was a long time before all the gravel was out of his cuts and scratches and his knees and palms were covered with strips of plaster. Then she washed his face. This, of course, was unnecessary but he was too polite to protest. She had become quite friendly and talkative now, only rarely and suddenly falling into strange silences, and looking at him as she had looked with her face close to his in the garden. When he was finally bandaged and cleaned to her satisfaction, she brought him a glass of milk and a big slice of fruit cake.

She came with him to the gate.

“Will you be able to find your way home?”

This was a question often asked of Toughy on his travels. People never seemed to realise that if a person

found his way to a place, obviously a person could find his way back again. He never answered it; he did not answer it now but said: "Goodbye!" and started home.

He returned to the house ~~next~~ day. He knocked at the porch door. When the woman opened it, she stared at him with that strange cold expression as on their first meeting. She said, and her voice was cold, too: "What brings you here again?"

"There was a thing I was wondering about all night. I mean, while I was awake." Toughy frowned. "You said you didn't like me. But then there was washing me and cake and all that. That was silly if you didn't like me. I suppose you like me now? Was it that you started not liking me and then liked me when you knew me?"

She took a long while to reply.

"That was it," she said, at last.

Toughy nodded.

"I thought that was it. I'm glad you like me now. I'll come in and stay with you for awhile."

He stayed until she sent him home. She would not let him go beyond the door in the hall that led to the back of the house, but he wandered happily about the front rooms (the second room of two windows was a bedroom, as glorious as the sitting-room) and the garden and before he left she gave him more milk and cake. At the gate he said: "I'll come again tomorrow. Maybe tomorrow my knees will be able to go in and out the windows. You promised I could."

She knelt down and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Do you tell anyone you're coming here, Toughy?"

"I never tell anyone where I'm going."

"Don't ever tell anyone, Toughy! It'll be a secret."

between you and me. Because if the—the man you met ——” She faltered. “—if that man ever knew you were here, he’d be very angry and he’d send you away for ever. That would be a pity.”

“Yes. You’d miss me a lot.”

She laughed oddly. She had a number of odd ways, but he was becoming used to them.

“That’s why you must stay in the front part of the house. If any of the workmen saw you, that man might get to hear. If anyone at all knew you were coming here, that man might be told. So you must be careful about our secret, Toughy!”

When he arrived on the following day, she seemed different. She looked younger, and she was smiling. There was no one but themselves in the house, she said; the men were far off in the east fields. When Toughy said she must be glad to have him to help, she laughed an ordinary laugh. She led him through the kitchen into the farmyard and left him there while she made soda bread. Rough was in the yard; he barked once but recognised Toughy immediately and accompanied him on his investigations. It was a very fine, clean yard, a good match for the house and garden. All the hens were white, with one splended white cock and even the pigs were clean.

They had a very busy afternoon. They made butter, and Toughy turned the wheel on the hearth to boil the kettle and the saucepan of eggs for tea. They could not linger over this meal, for soon the men would return for theirs, but though they ate and talked with an eye on the clock, they were comfortable and happy together. Then she said he must go.

“But you’ll come again, Toughy?”

"I expect I'll come every day until I get tired of it."

"Do you think you might get tired of coming?"

"I don't feel as if I'd get tired of it now, but, of course, you never know. New things are exciting but then other things that you haven't done yet get more exciting. Probably," he said, kindly, observing her disappointment, "this place will stay exciting for a long time."

He came every day. Sometimes he could not cross the barrier of the door in the hall, but more often the whole place was free to him. He worked very hard and could not help realising how immensely valuable he must be to her. Strangely, the more familiar everything became, so the less he was inclined to weary of his visits. Having frequently fed the hens, he had a keen personal interest in their progress; when she told him how the butter was esteemed on the market, he knew some share of the praise belonged to him; when he had raked and hoed the garden paths several times, he took a flower as his due.

One day he said to her: "You couldn't beat our farm anywhere."

"Oh, Toughy!" she said. "What did you say?" and when he said it again, she started to cry.

For a moment he was afraid her odd ways were coming back, but it was all right. She stopped soon and made a special jam pancake for his tea.

VIII

TO MMY had a pain.

It was a bad pain, but bearable. If it became any worse, it wouldn't be bearable. Tommy was hoping he would be able to hold out until nine o'clock tonight. Jamesy would be home then, and Tommy could go away somewhere and lie down quietly with his pain, to do which at the moment seemed to him the ultimate of bliss.

Jamesy had gone away five days ago on some business of his own. He had left Tommy in charge of the place and everything on it, including the twenty pounds that were kept for an emergency under a layer of flour in an innocent-looking biscuit tin beneath the bed. Tommy was to sleep at night in Jamesy's bed over the biscuit tin, with the twelve-bore, single-barrelled gun propped near to his hand. Jamesy gave him full permission to use the gun for marauders by night or day—anyone after the money, Jamesy said, or the chickens, or even the potatoes, it was all the one. You could shoot at legs, Jamesy said, and then there'd be no harm done but a few pellets, and all the good in the world. Tommy listened gravely but when Jamesy left, he unloaded the gun and instead brought Collie in to sleep on a meal sack by his bed.

Several times before he left, Jamesy said: "You'll be all right?"

"Yes," Tommy said.

"Have a good eye to that white calf! She's not thriving the way I'd like."

"Yes."

Inconsequently, Jamesy asked: "Would you like the County Kildare, do you think?"

"Limestone soil. It makes fine bone."

"Nice little farms there," said Jamesy. "Nice snug little farms. Oh, there are, indeed!"

He laughed suddenly, stopped, looked at Tommy, laughed again but said no more about County Kildare.

No one came after the biscuit tin or the chickens or the potatoes and Tommy was very happy for the first three days. He missed Jamesy; when a pair were accustomed to working together it felt strange for one to be alone. The wireless, too, was less entertaining without a companion. But, to offset this, everything was doing well; even the white calf, Tommy thought hopefully, had improved, maybe. He was giving it a special mixture that he had previously suggested to Jamesy, but which Jamesy flatly said would kill her. It wasn't killing her.

Tommy was a good boy but obstinate once he was sure he was right.

On the fourth day the pain started. It began in the middle of his stomach and moved along until it stuck down deep in his right side. A moving pain, Tommy thought, couldn't be much; if it moved on around more, it would finish up as lumbago. But it didn't move on. It stayed in the one spot, and it narrowed and concentrated and struck so deep that it surprised Tommy at the depths that must be in himself.

On the fifth day, he was only able to get around by bending towards the pain. Somehow he crawled through the day's work, doing only what must be done, bent

together like an old crippled man, dragging himself out to the closet in the yard to be sick and sick again until at last there was no need to stir from his chair by the fire for the empty retching that still shook him.

He was roused from a coma of pain and sickness by Jamesy's roaring curses. He stirred and groaned, saw Jamesy standing in the dusky kitchen outlined against the failing light outside, closed his eyes, opened them again and still saw Jamesy.

"Oh!" he said. "You—you came."

"And a nice bloody welcome you have for me! A nice —ing welcome, you —er!" said Jamesy. He kicked at Collie, missed, and knocked over a bucket of water left in the middle of the floor where Tommy's ebbing strength had failed. "But don't disturb yourself! Finish your little snooze! You don't mind if I light the lamp do you? That won't upset you?"

"There's no oil in it," said Tommy, miserably.

At the third attempt, Jamesy struck a match. The other two matches had broken in his rage. Silent now, lips tight pressed together, breathing heavily through his nose, he lit a stump of candle in a tin on the table. He was trembling with a bitter, lost desolation. For the first time in his life, he had been looking forward to his homecoming. Tommy would be there, waiting for him. The lamp and the fire would be bright; the kettle would be singing; Tommy would have an extravagant, forbidden pan of rashers and eggs ready for him. After the meal, they'd sit around the fire with cups of tea, and he'd give Tommy *Modern Intensive Farming* by Kurt Gebler that they'd heard reviewed on the wireless last week and they'd have a bit of music, maybe, and they'd talk.

He looked around at the untidy kitchen, at the dead

fire, at Tommy still sitting in his chair. His heart was sick.

"I was a fool to expect you'd do other than take your ease when I wasn't here to drive you. Would you mind," said Jamesy, with exquisite politeness, "getting to hell out of here while I set the fire going and get myself a bite to eat after my long journey?"

"I'm sorry," Tommy said. His lips quivered; with an effort he stemmed back the disgraceful tears. "I meant to have everything nice for you. I think I must have fallen asleep. But you'll find everything else all right. You will, really." He levered himself from his chair. "There's a spark in the fire yet." He looked at the spilt water flooding in dreary runnels over the dusty floor. "I'll get—." He hesitated. "If you go to the pump, I'll fix the fire."

He began to move towards the heap of dry sticks in the corner. He tried to hold himself upright but he was forced to yield and bend towards the merciless pain. Jamesy stood unmoving. Then he suddenly strode over and held the candle close to Tommy's face.

"What's wrong with you?"

Tommy closed his eyes against the intolerable light.

"I'm not very well. But you'll find everything all right. You will really. Even the white calf—"

"God blast and damn the white calf!" said Jamesy. "Have you hurt yourself?"

"No. Only a pain. That's why I fell asleep. I thought if I rested it first I'd be able to have things ready in time for you. I shouldn't have done that. I'm very sorry. But if you'd go and get the water—. I'm afraid I couldn't carry the water but I can manage the fire and—I *think* I can manage the fire."

"By the looks of you," said Jamesy, grimly, "you can manage damn all!" He glared into Tommy's blinking eyes, black encircled in a wizened, yellow face. "Where's the pain?"

"Here," said Tommy, and when Jamesy jabbed, moaned and doubled up on himself.

"A damn' bad spot! I remember Polly Carey——" Jamesy stopped. "How long have you had it?"

"Since yesterday. But it wasn't so bad then. I was able to get around. And today, too, I got around—most of it. You'll find everything is all right. Even the white calf——"

"In the name of God Almighty, when I want to hear about the bloody calf, I'll ask you! Was there no one near you today or yesterday?"

"No. Why would there be?"

"Why would there be!" Jamesy snarled. "It wouldn't be such an odd thing to expect, would it? This is supposed to be a Christian country, isn't it? You'd think that a neighbour here or there might look in now and again to see how a young boy was getting on on his own, wouldn't you?" Tommy attempted no answer to this outburst of rhetorical questioning. He leaned crookedly against the wall. "You could be dead and buried without anyone knowing or caring!" Even in his agony, Tommy's logical mind groped after some obvious fallacy here. But he only put his head against the wall and sighed. The sigh seemed to drive Jamesy to more venomous rage. "And none of your precious family would demean themselves by coming this way either, I suppose? Oh, no! You could be dead and buried——"

"Not buried," said Tommy, feebly. "Not without someone knowing. Whoever buried me would have to know."

Satisfied at having elucidated this knotty point, he closed his eyes and sighed again.

James said, abruptly: "Get into the bed there while I go for the doctor!"

Tommy looked at him in weary surprise.

"But I must get home. They'll be expecting me at home. And I probably won't want the doctor at all. Mary will give me something——"

Jamesy's patience astonished himself. With comparative mildness, he repeated: "Get inside to bed!"

"I must get home."

"How?" asked Jamesy, brutally.

Tommy took a step away from the supporting well.

"I——" He paused. "If I were once up on the bike——"

"If you were once up on the hearse!" said Jamesy, and half-pushed, half-carried him into the bedroom and on to the bed. Then, with some idea that warmth was essential, he threw every article of clothing within reach on top of the blankets, lit a fresh candle, and scowled down at Tommy.

"You'll stay quiet there until I come back!" It was only too apparent that Tommy could do nothing else, but, scowling more horribly, Jamesy said hastily before he could speak: "And you'll do as I tell you! I'm your father!"

Tommy might look like a very old, very tired Chinaman, buried in a rag dump but his spirit was unbroken.

"My name is Monaghan."

"Whatever the bloody hell your bloody name is," said Jamesy, "I'm still your father!" and strode out, relieving his feeling by kicking Collie and the empty pail on his way. At the gate, he looked back once at the house, white under the early moon, at the black clumps of Tommy's

dahlias, budding but not yet in flower, at the golden square of light from the bedroom window, and then he got on his bicycle and lowered his head and cycled fast down the road.

When Mary opened the door of the Monaghan cottage to his knock, his sweating face was so pale that hers grew pale as his.

“Is there something wrong? Tommy?”

“He’s sick. I’m getting the doctor.”

“Is he very sick?”

“How the hell could I know! He looks bad enough for anything. Go over there and see to him until I get back!”

If she had made any protests or even questioned him further he would certainly have struck her. But she only said: “Yes,” and he was off again.

Dr. Condon had just sat down to a belated meal when Jamesy pushed his way in past an indignant maid.

“I’m sorry, doctor, but I’m afraid I’ll have to disturb you. Ach, be quiet, girl! Can’t he see for himself that you couldn’t keep me out!” He shut the door on the offended maid. “She said I’d have to wait quarter of an hour while you took your tea, but I can’t. It’s that boy I have working for me—that Monaghan boy. He’s bad. You’ll have to come at once.”

“I will, of course,” said the doctor, getting through his nice brown chops as rapidly as possible. “What’s wrong with him?”

“He looks like death.” Jamesy, looking like death himself, stared at Dr. Condon. “And a pain down here. And when I did *that*,” said Jamesy, demonstrating his test of the area, “it hurt him.”

“As well it might!” The doctor finished one chop.

He cast a glance at Jamesy and started on the second.
"I'll be with you now in a minute, Jamesy."

"It won't do to delay at all, doctor. That's the way Polly Carey went—before your time, that was. A pain there, too. When they got her into the hospital and opened her up it was too late. Full of rottenness, she was."

"We won't delay at all, Jamesy. You'd better sit down and take a short rest—you don't look too good, yourself. You're very breathless."

"I might have cycled a bit fast."

"You might."

"I wouldn't want the boy to die on my hands," said Jamesy, defensively.

"Takes a lot to kill a lad that age," said the doctor, callously. "Have a drop of something to keep out the cold, while I get a few things together."

Jamesy said, firmly: "No, thank you, doctor. I'd like to be on the way at once," and, with a sigh, the doctor rose and left an untasted plate of scones.

Mary was waiting for them. The lamp and the fire were bright in the neat kitchen. She brought the doctor into the bedroom and then came back to Jamesy.

"How is he?" Jamesy asked.

"He's not well. He's very worried because you had nothing to eat. He said you were to have rashers and eggs."

They were on a plate on a small table by the fire. Jamesy pushed the plate aside.

"I don't want them."

"He said you were to eat them."

Jamesy tried to eat his rashers and eggs, and failed. But thirstily he drank the tea and drew closer to the fire.

Both were silent, waiting. Once there came a moan from the bedroom and Jamesy's hand jerked so that the tea slopped all over the saucer.

"He's poked him again! He needn't have done that. I showed him where the pain was."

The doctor came out. He threw a professionally cheerful remark back at Tommy and closed the door. He crossed over to the fireplace.

"Yes. An appendix. May I have a cup of tea from your pot, Jamesy? Thank you, Mary! We'll see about getting him off at once. The sooner it's out the better." He frowned. "There's been enough time lost already. He's had this trouble since yesterday morning."

Jamesy said, crossly: "The boy's a fool! Will he be all right?"

"I hope so."

Jamesy was beating with a poker at a burning log, chipping off bright, noisy showers of sparks.

"There was a place Mrs. Frewen went to when all her insides got twisted up. You know it, doctor. You sent her there. There was a man made a good job of her. Would he be equal to doing this job for Tommy?"

"I have no doubt," said Dr. Condon, thinking with some amusement of the brilliant, but vain, surgeon in question, "that it would be within his competence."

"We'll have Mrs. Frewen's place and that man, so."

Dr. Condon sighed. He was really very tired.

"All that would cost a lot of money, Jamesy. Tommy will be perfectly well attended to at the hospital."

Beating away at the log, Jamesy ignored him.

"We'll have Mrs. Frewen's place and that man. He's a good boy to work," said Jamesy to the fire, "good as they come these days. which isn't saying much. It would

suit me to have him on his feet again as soon as possible."

Mary spoke. In a cold quiet voice, she said: "Of course, we can't afford anything but the hospital, doctor. But he'll be all right there, I know."

"As well off as anywhere else." Dr. Condon put down his cup. "I'll call in to your mother on my way."

Jamesy swivelled around in his chair to face them. He had the look of a dangerous animal.

"You'll do what I said, doctor. I can afford what I like. I can pay for what I want."

Between worry for his patient and an undigested meal, Dr. Condon lost his temper.

"I don't care a goddam where the boy goes, but I'm responsible for getting him somewhere quickly before he dies on my hands!"

Jamesy stood up. He faced Mary. For one instant of mute antagonism they regarded each other. Then, still looking at those cold eyes gazing so steadily back at him, Jamesy spoke.

"After all, he is my——" He hesitated. "Well, I don't think *he'd* mind——" he said, uncertainly, and Mary moved silently away to the shadows at the end of the kitchen.

When it became known that Tommy Monaghan was dying from peritonitis after an operation, everyone was very sorry. A harmless boy, people said, and the best of that lot, God help him. But it was considered quite time for God to have visited Bridget Monaghan with some trouble that wasn't of her own making and quite according with His customary divine inscrutability to have chosen the least obnoxious of the brood as the unfortunate instrument.

The parish was voluble with sympathy. The Monaghan children were addressed with unwonted pleasantness and Pansy's woebegone pathos touched the hardest heart and evoked many a little comforting gift of sweeties. Bridget Monaghan herself was allotted the forgiven status of the bereaved—after all, it was declared incontrovertibly, that a mother was still a mother, even if too frequently. Each encounter with a Monaghan left the neighbours gratified with their own charity and loving-kindness.

By contrast, each encounter with Jamesy Casey was a horrid test of tact and poise. Sympathy was ready and ample for him, too, but no one was sure either that he wished for it or that it was correct to offer it in the peculiarly delicate circumstances. Fortunately, such encounters were infrequent; Jamesy kept more solitary than ever, or else was met with in such a state of snarling venom that the springs of pity dried in every breast.

So matters continued for a week, with a general enormous increase of spiritual merit. Suddenly all this inestimable advantage was swept away as the parish fell into a bitter rage. Word came through that Tommy had ceased to die, that he was out of danger, that he was rapidly improving, that he was sitting up in bed in his expensive nursing home, with a private nurse at his beck night and day. Eating grapes most likely, someone remarked viciously, and it was felt that even this was not impossible. A recovering Monaghan in the ordinary public wards would have been tolerable; a recovering Monaghan in all the ridiculous luxury of a costly nursing home was not.

Once again, it was apparent that the devil looks after his own in this world, even if he can't do much for them in the next.

As a matter of fact, Tommy was eating grapes. Jamesy had brought them. He had also brought a yellow cake, the exact replica of the birthday cake (but this a smiling nurse had quickly taken in her charge) and *Modern Intensive Farming*. He sat now by Tommy's bed, looking at him very hard and speaking very little.

"How are you?" he asked, at last, after a long period of silence while Tommy studied his book.

"I'm all right."

"You won't be able to work for awhile after getting out of here. The doctor said so."

Tommy said, scornfully: "They fuss a lot here."

"You don't look up to much yet."

"I'm all right. Did you get another boy?"

"No."

"You'll need one if I can't get back yet."

"I'll manage."

"How's the white calf?"

"She's all right. I found the bottle you were giving her." Jamesy scowled. "I let her finish it."

There was another silence.

"I can't waste any more time here," said Jamesy. He stood up. "They said you could have a wireless. There's one coming. Hired—so be careful of it. If you break it, you'll have to pay for it."

"I won't break it."

"Goodbye, so. I may call in again now and then, if I'm passing," said Jamesy, ignoring the unlikelihood of his chancing to pass twenty miles from his home.

On his way home, he stopped at Hurley's in Kilmuc. William Bates heard him whistle as he cycled up the street and was uneasy. Rightly, William distrusted all unnatural phenomena. He was more uneasy still when

Jamesy's message was relayed to him but he entered the little back parlour at Hurley's that night with his trepidation bravely concealed.

Jim Power was already there, and Matthew Hogan. So, too, was Dr. Condon, very comfortable in front of the fire. He nodded at William.

"Don't mind me! I'll be off when Jamesy comes and leave you to settle your business by yourselves."

Matthew said, politely: "Not at all, doctor," and moved aside to let William bring his chair into the semi-circle. William arranged himself slowly. His brain was keyed up to meet Jamesy's cunning brain; he feared it wouldn't remain keyed up indefinitely. He said, uneasily: "He's late."

"Knows the value of an entrance, I expect," said the doctor. "A drink, William?"

William said, firmly: "No, thank you." He looked at his business companions. "I think when Jamesy comes, it might be as well if you stayed, doctor. It would do no harm to have a witness."

"Oh, I don't mind," said the doctor.

With a dignified bow from the waist, Matthew murmured: "*Justum et tenacem propositi virum . . .*" and Jim Power grunted.

William was in a very bad humour.

"It's a hell of a pity you didn't take Holy Orders, Matthew, and you could mumble Latin to yourself all day long!"

Matthew's hollow chest swelled.

"I am not aware that I mumble, William."

Dr. Condon said, hastily: "Hand me the poker, Jim. I like a nice blaze—in a fire." He glanced at the three

glum faces and smiled cheerfully: "You'll all be glad to have this matter settled."

"I'm not so sure," said William darkly, "that we're not making fools of ourselves."

"Oh, hardly that. Acting as decent men, I would suggest. Yes, A clean break. Nothing to reproach yourselves with. H'm! Mind you," said the doctor, "no one could have anything against those children." He looked at Matthew. "*Per se*," he added.

Jamesy came in. He was smiling. He sat down, rubbing his hands and holding them to the fire. He apologised for being delayed, glanced at the empty glasses and called loudly for refills. In all he did, he created a horrible atmosphere of unease. Even when he had laid all his facts and figures before them, neatly written in a penny exercise book, no one was happy. Except Jamesy. He seemed very happy indeed. He leaned back, stretched out his legs and held his glass high.

"Well, there we are! Thirty-six acres and a nice house—all at the right price. And at the right distance. I couldn't put it to her while she was worried over that boy. It wouldn't have been decent. But I called in to her on my way here now, talked to her for an hour, and it's all fixed. She'll go."

William broke the silence that followed.

"I suppose," he said, weakly, "it's all right?" There seemed no reason, except Jamesy, to believe that it wasn't. He pulled himself together. "You're an independent witness, doctor. How does it appear to you?"

But before Dr. Condon could answer, Jim Power said, roughly: "It's what we settled, isn't it? There's no point in discussing it any further."

Jamesy nodded approvingly.

"All that's to be done now is to have it signed, sealed and delivered. We'll get a solicitor at that tomorrow. She'll go within the next four weeks."

"*Jus et norma loquendi,*" said Matthew unwisely and William turned on him.

"*Et foola you cum foola biggat et dominus vobiscum,*" said William. "I'm going home."

Jamesy looked disappointed.

"I thought we'd celebrate."

"What the hell have I to celebrate!" said Jim Power and went out with William.

Jamesy sighed.

"You'll join me, anyway, Matthew?"

"Thank you, Jamesy! I *will* have another tankard of ale." Matthew coughed nervously. "H'm! The woman—she—ah—won't talk about this arrangement, I hope?"

"Give her her due," said Jamesy, "she never talks. She'll go and that's all. None but ourselves will be any the wiser."

"One would not wish to be the subject of gossip. It is most distasteful to have one's private affairs the object of vulgar comment."

"One needn't worry," said Jamesy. "Whisky for you, doctor?"

Dr. Condon was looking at him curiously.

"You seem to have gone to a great deal of trouble over this affair, Jamesy."

"I did indeed, doctor. And little thanks I'm getting for it, either. Except from Matthew, of course."

"Quite so. You wouldn't be looking for more than thanks, would you, Jamesy?"

"Ah, now, doctor, where would I be getting it?"

"I don't know, Jamesy. But I'm disappointed in myself. I thought I was a good judge of character."

If Jamesy was an unwelcome guest on his few necessary visits to the Monaghan home, it apparently did not worry him.

No Monaghan concealed its feelings towards him. Pansy hardly deigned to notice him, Toughy found him unappreciative and dull, and Pius always went soundly to sleep at his approach. Mary was more positive in her emotion, but Jamesy as little heeded her as the others.

Bridget Monaghan alone of her family received him with the gentle courtesy she had for all. She had never been known to act unkindly towards anyone, nor to speak unkindly, even of her betrayers. She had been bewildered by Jamesy's offer.

"But how nice of them!" she said. "How very nice of them! And of you, too, Jamesy, of course. A farm—for *me*! But I really don't understand why." She paused and frowned thoughtfully. "Oh, yes, I see. In a way. But still—a farm! It really is most considerate."

Jamesy had wasted no time on her. He had addressed Mary directly.

"I've an option on the place for a week. No longer."

"We've never wanted anything from anybody. We don't want it now."

"You can look at it that it's a fair bargain on both sides."

"We don't want it."

Bridget said, wistfully: "A nice brick house, you said?"

"Yes, m'am. A good range in the kitchen, too. Village only a mile away—schools and all the rest." Jamesy stopped. "New neighbours. Mary doesn't like new

neighbours, though—she prefers old ones with long memories.”

“And a garden, Jamesy?”

“Walled in, m’am. Fine clean yard. Solid out-buildings. But Mary would be lonely there.”

Bridget was mildly surprised.

“Well, if you wouldn’t like it, dear, we won’t think twice about it.”

“She’s afraid her little brothers and sisters would be lonely there. It’s better for them to be growing up here amongst the people who knew them all their lives. A prosperous little farm away in the County Kildare wouldn’t make up for leaving all the good neighbours of Doon.”

For a moment, he was afraid he had goaded Mary too far. But she sat silently looking at him until the gruff voice of Toughy was heard outside, calling to Pansy, and then she started and her gaze wavered and Jamesy knew he had succeeded.

“Another three weeks,” said Jamesy, “and you’ll be moving out of Doon.”

“Yes,” Tommy said.

It was a week since he had left the nursing home. Although the freckles still showed stereoscopically on his pale face, he was rapidly regaining his strength. But he was very quiet. Even Jamesy’s reiterations of the merits of the tidy farmstead waiting in the County Kildare for the Monaghans had not aroused him to a show of interest.

“Apple trees, even,” Jamesy said. “Not old hulks, either, mind you! And bushes. Raspberries and such. Do you like raspberries?”

“I dunno. I never ate them.”

"Ah, well, you wouldn't be bothered with the likes of those. Your mother was, though. Apple blossom, she was talking about, and jam. Mostly apple blossom. She didn't seem to care much about the apples."

Tommy grunted.

"You'll be able to try out all your new-fangled ideas for yourself."

Tommy said: "Ur!"

"And a good market handy to you."

They were sitting by the fire after their evening meal. Tommy grunted again. He stood up and stooped to the hearth to lift the pot of boiling pig-meal off the crook. With a sudden push, Jamesy sent him sprawling back into his chair.

"What kind of a bloody fool are you! Didn't the doctor tell you to take things easy? Didn't he tell you not to go lifting weights?"

"That was a week ago."

"Ah, for God's sake!" said Jamesy, crossly. "I'm tired of being a nursemaid to you. Signs by, are you drinking that bottle he gave you? I don't suppose it'll do you any good, but it's paid for and it might as well be drunk."

"I take it when I remember."

"Do you expect me to follow you around with a spoon? Do you want to go sick on me again?"

Jamesy grumbled away to himself unanswered as he swung the big pot to one side of the fire. Tommy watched him silently.

"I'm not much use to you now," he said, at last.

"You're not."

"Will I stay until we go away, or would you like to get another boy?"

"You might as well stay for the few weeks."

"You're looking around for another boy, I suppose?"

"Ach, what's the hurry! There's plenty to be had. And we don't want to be rousing talk amongst the neighbours. What they don't know can't trouble 'em. When the Monaghans are gone, they can talk their heads off, but they're not going to know anything beforehand."

Tommy was slumped in his chair, gazing at the fire. Jamesy coughed. There was a long silence between them.

"The new boy——" said Tommy, at last.

"What new boy?"

"The one that'll be coming instead of me."

"Oh, him! What about him?"

"Tell him the roses will want to be pruned. Every year," said Tommy firmly. He paused. "I'd wish to have seen——. I'd be kind of interested to know how the three-acre field does."

"The three-acre field won't be troubling you when you're on your own fine farm."

"It might. I was always kind of interested in that field."

Jamesy looked at him hard but said nothing. Tommy sat up straight.

"Sausages! You mustn't go back to sausages." He leaned forward earnestly. "There's no nourishment in sausages. And eggs. One egg a day you could eat, anyway."

Jamesy said: "H'm!" He struck a match and lit his pipe with great deliberation. "You're afraid I'll step back into bad habits without you looking after me?"

"You might."

Jamesy glanced at his son.

"I might," he said, and puffed at his pipe.

IX

MARY had been attempting for days to say what must be said. Several times she had opened her mouth to speak to Paul Darmody, looked at him and closed her mouth again. And once when she had actually succeeded in beginning: "I'm afraid—" Florrie had come in and asked, worriedly: "What's wrong, Mary? What are you afraid of?" so that she had to say, weekly, that she was afraid the moths might get into the stored blankets in the hotpress. And Florrie had said, brightly: "Oh, you'll manage that, Mary. Newspaper, isn't it, and sulphur? No, not sulphur—"

"Camphor."

"Oh, you'll look after that all right. Mary can look after everything, can't she, Paul?"

Paul had smiled and said: "Yes."

Although, later that day, she was alone with him and free from interruption (for Florrie was in the bathroom putting an egg-mask on her face) she could not tell him. But as each day went by—so quickly they went, too—the more she realised her silence was unfair. For they must have time to search for someone who would, when she was gone, care for them as she had tried to do.

Now, standing by the table, she clenched her fists and waited to hear her own words.

"I'll be leaving at the end of next week, Mr. Darmody."

They were horrible words. With constant mental rehearsal, they sounded unnatural in her own ears. The room was quiet with the peace of evening, with fire-light on the walls, with the little murmur of flames in the coal, with the rustle of Paul's book. The horrible words fell into the whispering stillness with a discordant clang.

Paul said, gently: "I'm very sorry, Mary. We'll miss you." He did not look up from his book. "We were very happy with you. But I realise it can't be easy for you here."

"I'm happy here. I don't want to go. It's because we're all going. We're going away."

He put down his book.

"Away from Doon?"

"Yes. Nobody knows yet, but I had to tell you. It wouldn't be right for me just to walk away without telling you."

He said, so softly that she hardly heard: "It doesn't seem right for you to walk away at all." Still he was not looking at her but idly playing with the pages of his book. "Are you going far away?"

"To Kildare. We're going to live there. We won't ever be coming back."

"Never again." He slammed his book shut. "Thank you for telling me. If it's a secret, I fear we must keep it from Florrie."

"I suppose so."

"She'll miss you."

Mary said: "I wish I hadn't to go."

"I wish you hadn't to go, Mary."

They looked at one another in a long silence. When Florrie came in, they turned their heads slowly and stared at her. Florrie gave a sudden shriek of laughter.

"My dears, you're both so odd! What's the matter? Oh, my face, of course. Egg white, that's all."

Paul picked up the poker and began to tap it on the bar of the grate.

"Is there something on your face?"

"Is there something on my face!" Florrie's round eyes gazed at him like two holes in a meringue. "Paul! You're dreaming! Leave it on for fifteen minutes, it said, but it's too cold to wait upstairs. Besides, I'm sure the heat will hurry it up. Where I made the mistake last time, Mary, was to beat the *whole* egg and put it on. Ugh! I thought I'd never get it off again. But, you see, the yolk is for a shampoo, the white is for your face. So handy. None of it wasted."

"Yes, Miss Darmody."

"Once a woman reaches the age of thirty, she should pay attention to her skin. She'll be thankful when she's forty. I'm sure I shall be. If you'd like me to show you, Mary, how I—" Florrie stopped. "No, of course, you wouldn't want to do much for your skin yet." She put her head on one side and regarded Mary critically. "Your skin is good. Yes, quite good." Slowly she moved her head to the other side. "You know, Paul, Mary is *pretty*."

"Yes, I'd noticed that."

"Had you really? That's intelligent of you, Paul, because when one is used to a person one doesn't notice what the person looks like." Florrie frowned. "But I think Mary must be getting prettier. I don't think she looked so pretty when I saw her first. Do you think you've got prettier since you came, Mary?"

"I don't think I was ever very pretty."

"Not *very* pretty—no. But pretty. A *nice* kind of face,

if you know what I mean. All the more reason," said Florrie, nodding vigorously, "why you must be careful never to let it sag. But pull in to the fire, child, and don't be out there in the cold!" She beamed at them both. "Isn't this grand and comfortable now, the three of us here and everything right, even me?"

Over her head, their glance met and wavered and met again.

Miss Kelly huddled over the fire, holding out her hands to the blaze. For the first time, Mary noticed that she was becoming frail and old. She even seemed smaller. When she spoke, her voice was unsteady.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't be, because no doubt it will be better for all of you to be gone from here, to make a new home for yourselves with no old shadows of the past. But I'm selfish. I'll miss the twins." She wound her arms across her narrow chest and hugged herself, bending forward to the fire. "When I offered to help you with the twins, I wasn't really being generous. I was thinking of myself, too. But it was no use explaining that to you. Mary. You wouldn't have believed me. You were too proud, too touchy. You're proud still but—" She regarded Mary curiously. "You've got softer. Not so much on the defensive. Not so—hurt."

Mary said, gently: "I never felt on the defensive with you."

"Not deliberately. I know that. But you were determined to shut yourself within yourself, away from the world. Maybe you were right, but I think that that unhappiness is worse than any the world can inflict. It's a dead unhappiness—at least, the other is alive." She smiled. "All I'm trying to say is that you look,

absurd as it sounds at your age, younger.” She touched Mary’s cheek with one finger. “You’re getting the bloom of youth at last, my dear.” Reflectively, she laid the finger against her own sallow cheek. “I’m sixty-one. I’ll be retiring in another four years. If I could have had the twins, they’d have been winning University scholarships about then. . . . Oh, well, you’ll write and let me know how you all get on, won’t you? I’m fond of the twins, Mary. They’re very ordinary children—intelligent, of course, but ordinary. I always got on best with ordinary children because I’m ordinary myself.”

“I have given my word,” said Johanna, “not to mention it. I have given my word not to press you for any more information. Same as Belinda Kelly.” She paused. “Or have I? Was that only a lady’s agreement? Whenever I’m curious, Mary, I forget I’m a lady.”

Mary said: “It wouldn’t be any use forgetting.”

“From the moment I saw you, Mary Monaghan, I realised you were a pig-headed, obstinate girl!” Johanna frowned. “Very well. But I’m sorry for the Darmodys. Worse off than ever,” said Johanna, accusingly, “since they’ve had a chance of knowing what comfort and cleanliness means. Because whatever your faults, Mary Monaghan—and I would be the last to deny them—I will say that you’re a competent housekeeper.”

Meekly, Mary said: “Thank you.”

“How you can have the heart to leave those poor creatures—!” Johanna rolled her eyes upwards. “Does Florrie know you’re going?”

“No. Only Mr. Darmody.”

“It’ll finish her—simply finish her! You should hear how she speaks of you! Such a *nice* girl—such a *kind* girl

—!” She repeated Florrie’s supposed words in a bitter falsetto. “All so happy together! H’m! He doesn’t mind, of course?”

“If you can get someone else. . . .”

“I got him one good housekeeper and he couldn’t hold her. He can find another for himself.”

“But you *know* I can’t help——”

“Tut, tut, child! You’re not going to cry! All right. I’ll look around. Don’t mind me! But I wish,” said Johanna, crossly, “that my plans weren’t upset!” Snorting and frowning, she regarded Mary. “Ah, well, child, you know I wish you every luck in your new home. But all the same, it’s most annoying.”

The younger Monaghan children were not told of their future change of circumstance. The day of departure was to arrive as unexpectedly for them as thereby, it was hoped, for their neighbours.

“For people may talk when the Monaghans are gone,” said William, “but there’ll be no Monaghans for them to question.”

“They’ll go mad,” said Jamesy.

“What they won’t know, can’t hurt them.”

“Ah, but that’s what will.”

William looked at him and suffered the customary pang of self distrust at sight of the closed, foxy face.

“I suppose each of us will be sufficiently honourable to keep our mouths shut afterwards.”

“I don’t know about the honour,” said Jamesy, reflectively, “but you should know me well enough by now to be sure that I won’t waste any unnecessary words on the neighbours.”

If William could have been certain that Jamesy’s

taciturnity would predominate over his malice, he would have felt more secure. But he was certain of nothing with Jamesy.

Jim Power said, roughly: "What the hell does it matter? The Monaghans will be gone from here and that's all there's to it."

(Several times lately he had chanced to be passing by Doon and he had chanced to catch a glimpse of that brat now and again. He was exactly as he had remembered him, that Toughy. A bold-looking brat. Once he'd been trying to catch a hen. Once he'd been balancing on the top bar of a gate. Once he had come strolling along the road towards Jim, with his fists stuck in his pockets and stopped and said: "Hallo!" and then: "Oh, I didn't reco-nise you," and sauntered by with his grimy face held skywards.

"Maybe you'd recognise my bull!"

"I wouldn't reco-nise any of you," Toughy said, without turning his head, "I've forgotten you," and walked on.

Pansy, of course, was privately aware of what was to happen. She always was. The cottage was small and Pansy's hearing acute. No tracker ever moved more cautiously and soundlessly through dangerous jungle than Pansy over the floors of her home. She was a child who realised the power of being well-informed.

But now no place or person held any significance for her but the Magnate and London. She was waiting for a letter from the Magnate.

During the few days of their acquaintance, they had developed a mutual admiration. Each recognised the hard, selfish, real artist in the other. On the first day, Pansy had played her scenes as directed. On the second

day, she had ventured a criticism and was ordered to do as she was told. On the third day she had made a suggestion.

"A child wouldn't talk like that if her father was drowned. And a brother, too, you said?"

"Three brothers."

"That's a lot. That would make her talk like that all the less." Pansy frowned. "She wouldn't come down to the sea and stand and call Daddy and speak about being lonely, like you're making me do."

Mr. Horton drew a deep breath. Everyone drew deep breaths and waited for the storm to break. But it did not break. Mr. Horton eyed Pansy curiously. He said: "What would she do?"

Pansy stood. She closed her eyes. She saw a father tossing in the sea, very handsome in a blue jersey. She saw three brothers in the sea, in blue jerseys and handsome, too, but smaller. One was quite small. He was only a year older than she. He was like a boy in a book. He had fought when rough boys were rude to her, and always won. He was floating now down under the waves. There was no one any more to save her from the rough boys.

Pansy opened her eyes. With a wide blind stare, she walked towards the sea. She stood at the edge of the water. Her hands hung at her sides. Her gaze ranged the horizon and travelled slowly back to the tide at her bare feet. She stood, looking down, and then, as a small wave broke over her toes, she screamed, and backed in rigid horror, holding out her hands to ward off the hungry water.

"Jesus Christ!" murmured Mr. Horton, reverently, "an actress with ideas! I've caught the first live one!" To Pansy he said: "Like that, eh?"

“Yes.”

“But you didn’t speak at all.”

Pansy raised her heart-broken eyes to his. How could she speak when that beautiful small brother, so unlike a real brother, was lost and wet out there?

“She wouldn’t speak.”

“Come on!” said Mr. Horton briskly to everyone. “We’re wasting time. Do what you’re supposed to do, Pansy, and get on with it!”

Pansy immediately became as Irish as Maybella had been and cheerfully got on with it.

Someone said: “There was something about that little scene——”

“Art,” said Mr. Horton, “that’s all. It wouldn’t do. This film’s pure punk, can’t mix art with it. Pure punk is all right—sometimes. Pure art, all right. Mix ‘em and you get poison. But maybe afterwards——” He eyed Pansy with that same speculative curiosity. “Well—maybe——”

He spoke again to Bridget Monaghan before he left.

“It’s possible that we can use Pansy in the future. But that would mean we would need her in London. We might want to put her under contract for a number of years. How would you feel about letting her go?”

“She wouldn’t stand in my light,” Pansy said.

“I don’t suppose anyone could do that for long,” said Mr. Horton. To her mother he said: “As soon as a decision has been made, one way or the other, I’ll let you know.”

“I’ll like London.” Pansy said.

So now she moved aloof, in a world of her own, waiting for the summons. The ordinary world that encompassed her hardly touched her at all; she was dreamily gentle

and good and obedient to its shadowy inhabitants so that Mary was worried by this pleasing, but extraordinary, development and was each day relieved anew that Pansy continued in apparently perfect health, Jennifer alone shared Pansy's world. She knew that simplicity and the domestic qualities were current publicity in the film domain; it was necessary for a star to be photographed either bending over an oven or a baby. Even that rather witless Maybella had had sufficient awareness to insist that she was a very simple child. Jennifer was to be Pansy's homely trade mark.

Day followed day without the summons, but Pansy was not impatient. She gathered a set of clothes for instant departure and put them carefully folded in a cardboard box. They would, of course, be discarded when she arrived in London where a new wardrobe would be bought immediately but they were sufficiently decent for the journey. She got her mother to make a red flannel skirt and a green shawl for Jennifer. She had discovered that these were very Irish garments. She considered it would be best to keep Jennifer perpetually clad in this distinctive national style. And she waited for the postman every morning.

But what finally came was a cablegram, followed, early that night, by the Magnate himself. All was as Pansy had expected; they were favourably impressed by her possibilities; they wanted her for a film which had been postponed pending a suitable child actress. They hoped that in Pansy they had found such a one.

"And if she turns out as I think she will," said Mr. Horton "it will be a big thing for her."

Pansy listened, calmly silent, while her mother and Mary and the Magnate talked. The Magnate was per-

susative and business-like in a humane manner; Mary was upset and anxious and indecisive; her mother occasionally interjected an unhelpful but kindly remark. Details of Pansy's future life were discussed and, to Pansy's boredom, discussed again and still Pansy sat, quiet and demure, among her elders. But at last she had to intervene. This was when Mary was pulling at her handkerchief and saying: "But we couldn't let her off alone, not with no one to look after her. We couldn't," and Mr. Horton was saying: "I'm afraid I hadn't anticipated that difficulty. I took it for granted that there would be some relative. But we can arrange for a suitable guardian in England. You don't have to worry about that."

"No," Mary said, "no. We couldn't let Pansy go off alone to a strange country. We couldn't let her be brought up by someone we know nothing about."

"But there would be every safeguard. No arrangement would be made until you were quite satisfied yourselves."

"Don't you see," said Mary, angrily, "she's very small?"

Mr. Horton regarded Pansy with that curious stare she so often evoked from him.

"Yes," he said, "she is rather small. And young. One tends to forget how small and young."

"She'd be miserable away in England with no one belonging to her. You couldn't do that to a child. It would be wrong. No matter how much money she'd get, no matter if she'd have——" Mary looked around pitifully "—everything that we can't give her, as I suppose she would have, it would be wrong. It wouldn't make up for what she'd be missing. It would be unnatural."

Then Pansy spoke. She said, calmly: "I wouldn't mind being alone in a strange country."

"Oh, Pansy," said her sister, "you don't know what you're saying!"

"Yes, I do. But if you feel that I must have someone belonging to me to look after me, wouldn't my aunt do?"

Mary gasped. Bridget Monaghan said, in a very surprised voice: "Have you an aunt, Pansy?" and then: "Why, yes, so you have!"

Pansy ignored them both. She said to Mr. Horton: "My aunt has only my—" some instinctive caution made her pause "—has only her brother to look after. He's an old brother. He could look after himself. She should come and look after me. We could ask her." She stopped. A remembrance of Johanna gave even Pansy's self-confidence a twinge of misgiving. "A person shouldn't ruin another person's career by not doing a thing like that, should they?" She said, valiantly: "We could ask her."

Mary had regained her self-control. She said, quickly: "I'm afraid Pansy's idea isn't possible, Mr. Horton." She stood up. "You said you'd be staying in Ireland for about a week. Could you give us time to talk this over between ourselves and see what can be done?"

Pansy opened her mouth to protest but one look at Mary's face caused her to shut it again. Pansy knew when her sister was not to be trifled with. Mary was staring steadily and coldly and commandingly at her. Pansy blinked. Then she opened her eyes very wide, she put out one little hand towards the hand of Mr. Horton which was hanging by his side. Mr. Horton blinked, too, as the small fingers closed trustfully on his. Pansy lifted her round, wistful eyes to him and said, with the faintest suggestion of a lisp: "Mamma, may I go to the gate to say goodbye to Mr. Horton?"

Mr. Horton was surprised to realise how much the implied compliment pleased him. He hadn't known the little thing was so fond of him.

"I'll be back," he said, heartily, to comfort the worried little thing. "Don't you fret, Pansy! I'll be back."

Pansy's wistfulness increased.

"May I, mamma?"

"Of course, lovey."

Pansy's grip tightened. She moved with him towards the door. But Mary moved, too.

In the inner room, Pius slept. Bridget Monaghan was always surprised and saddened when each result of her recurring weakness arrived but she was a good, careful mother. Pius's toilet was never neglected; for a Doon baby, he was an exceptionally well-tended one. But whether by reason of the agitation caused by Mr. Horton's impending visit or from the intervention of whatever dark gods watched over Pansy, Pius's napkin-pin that night was carelessly fastened. As he stirred now, it opened. As he stirred again, the point stuck into his plump abdomen.

Pius woke and screamed.

Bridget Monaghan, with a word of apology to the guest, hurried to him. Mary stood for a moment dithering uncertainly and then as Pius's screams swelled with an authentic clamour of pain and rage, she cast a hopeless, imploring glance at Pansy and followed.

Quickly Pansy dragged Mr. Horton out into the night and down the short path to the gate where his car waited. She said, urgently "We'll go and see my aunt now."

Mr. Horton was a gentleman. It always took him

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some little time to overcome this disadvantage and Pansy had given him none. He hesitated, shocked.

“But, Pansy——”

Pansy was already scrambling into the car.

“Come on!”

“We can’t go without asking your mother.”

Pansy’s short upper lip lifted in a snarl.

“Hurry! Pius is stopping!”

Matthew was from home, sitting peacefully over his tankard of ale in Hurley’s, when Johanna brought Mr. Horton and Pansy into her chill little parlour. She sat them down and listened in grim silence to Mr. Horton’s embarrassed explanation of their visit. To himself, he sounded absurd; he had no doubt he sounded even more absurd to this forbidding woman. He concluded with a feeble effort at self-justification.

“I was not aware of the—the unusual circumstances until Pansy informed me during our drive here.” He paused and coughed. Hopefully, he added: “But she told me you had been very kind to her.”

“I have,” said Johanna, “spoken to the child on only two occasions in my life.”

Pansy looked at Johanna with big, hurt eyes.

“You gave me milk and biscuits.”

Johanna stared at her and Pansy stared as steadily back. She, too, could play the waiting game. It was Johanna who spoke at last.

“Pansy’s family have forbidden her to come here. I’m afraid they will be very annoyed when they know of this. You had better take her home at once.”

Mr. Horton stood up. He said: “I’m sorry! I had no idea there was antagonism between you and Pansy’s family. You will understand, if I had known that, I,

wouldn't have come here." He looked angrily at Pansy, who had led him into this discomfort, sitting pretty and appealing on the edge of her chair. His anger suddenly was diverted to Johanna, to anybody and everybody but Pansy whom he needed so much. "Well, what's so wrong about it?" he demanded, fiercely. "I want the child to have her chance. Apparently she's not to be allowed to have it, in spite of all I can do, but I don't blame myself for trying to do my best for her."

Johanna shot up from her chair. Between the two figures, Pansy's head was bent. She studied the shining toes of her strapped patent shoes.

"You'd think," she said, in a slow, low voice, "that if a person had a brother that left people starving and deserted, they'd want to atone to the people that were starving and deserted. You'd *think* they would. You wouldn't think they'd be cross with the people that were starving and deserted. Maybe they'll be sorry," she said, darkly, to her shoes, "when the people are dead." She paused. She remembered Matthew and his heartlessness regarding the sanitation. "Or maybe they won't be sorry. Maybe they're *very* bad."

Breathless and weak, she drooped in her chair, a broken symbol of man's inhumanity to man. Above her neat curls, the glances of the others met. Johanna's lips twitched. "Sit down!" she said abruptly and bounced back into her own chair. Thankfully, Mr. Horton relaxed. Johanna folded her hands in her lap and cleared her throat. She said: "There is no antagonism between Pansy's family and me. Only between Pansy and me."

"What's between us?" Pansy asked, cautiously.

"You and I are not friends, Pansy."

Pansy considered.

"We're not enemies. We might get used to each other."

Johanna's lips twitched again.

"What made you think you'd like to have me in charge of you?"

"There's no one else," Pansy said. She frowned at the unadorned truth which sounded bleak and unpleasant to her ears and no doubt, more important, to Johanna's also. She recollect ed an overheard commendatory phrase. "And you're a most respectable woman."

Johanna laughed outright. She said to Mr. Horton: "Forgive me if I was abrupt with you. I'm afraid I've reached the age when any new idea puts me immediately on the defensive. You must admit it was an extraordinary proposition that I should suddenly uproot myself for a niece—of sorts—and leave my home and my brother and—"

Pansy interrupted. She said, meditatively: "That's why I thought maybe you'd be glad to come. I mean, about leaving your home and your brother and everything. I mean, you've had all those for such a long time and you must be tired of them. They're the kind of things a person would get tired of very soon, I was tired of Doon long ago. You're old," said Pansy, frankly, "and you'll be dead soon and if you don't come with me you'll probably never have time for the nice things, only the dull things always." She paused, worried by a passing fear. "Of course, if you're the kind that only wants the ordinary things, maybe you won't want to come. Some people are that way. Mary is." She considered Johanna. "But I thought maybe you might be one of my kind of ones. You don't *look* like me, but I thought maybe you might be a bit like me all the same. I mean, because

you're my aunt and the call of the blood. I mean, I didn't really think you'd bother to come for me—not even for the deserted and starving reason, though you should, too," said Pansy, accusingly, "—but I thought maybe you'd come for yourself." Her slow glance encompassed the small room, passed from the large photograph of Matthew on the chimneypiece, sitting in a Waterford studio with a wonderful view of the Mediterranean coast behind him and two fingers in the pages of the closed book on his knee, to the fireless grate beneath, roving by each small shiny uncomfortable piece of furniture until it stopped at the window where the drawn blind shut out the dreary village street, shut out the electric standard opposite shining down on the huckster's shop between F. DROHAN, *Shoemaker* and W. WILSON, *Ladies and Gents Outfitters*, shut out the nightly death of Kilmuc. Slowly her glance returned again, came to the photograph, dignified, cultured, intellectual, and stayed there. "If it was me," said Pansy, "I'd come."

She stopped. She was very tired. It was past her bed-time. Her chair was too high and her legs ached. The others were talking away but she found it hard to keep awake to listen to them. Anyway, she could do no more. She thought it was probably a good sign when Johanna brought them into the kitchen, where the fire was one big, warm mass of red in the range, and put her into a low chair where a person's feet could rest on the ground and gave her milk and six chocolate biscuits and made tea for the Magnate and herself. She must have fallen asleep after eating her fourth biscuit, because she found her eyes closed and when she opened them there were two biscuits still on the plate and her aunt and the Magnate had finished their tea and were standing up.

"Come on home!" said Mr. Horton.

Pansy yawned politely, with two fingers tapping her mouth, as Mary had taught her. Then she shook herself awake and blinked at them.

"Am I going to London?"

"She *is* small," said Mr. Horton, "I keep on forgetting what a small child she is."

"Young," said Pansy, "but not small. Not for my age."

Johanna said: "It's easy to forget Pansy's youth. What is important is to remember that her soul is old. As old," said her aunt, musingly, "as sin."

Mr. Horton laughed. Pansy noticed that he and her aunt seemed to have become very friendly.

"I've never found good people very interesting."

"H'm!" said Johanna. She stared down at Pansy. "You'll have to do what I tell you in future."

Pansy stared back fervently.

"Oh, I will!"

"You will. I'll see to that."

They measured each other's strength silently. Then Pansy's lips parted in a sweet smile.

"May I call you aunt?" Johanna nodded. "Oh!" For a moment, Pansy appeared to savour the joy of this permission. Her eyes, fixed on Johanna, brimmed over with love and gratitude. "Thank you—aunt!" she said, softly. She turned to Mr. Horton. "She wouldn't let me call her aunt before." Her lip drooped. "It's sad for a person to have only one aunt and not be allowed to call her it."

A fleeting shocked expression crossed Mr. Horton's face. Then he looked at Pansy and laughed.

"You see!" he said to Johanna, with a proud proprietary gesture. "She's got *everything*!"

Johanna said, wildly: "I must be mad to think of tying myself up in any way with that child!"

"I'm not fooling myself about her. No! If I don't make Pansy Monaghan known all over the world—all over the world, mark you——"

"Mad! To leave my home—at my age——"

"Why should it be thought mad to do something new, something vital? Why accept as sanity the dull, humdrum, day-to-day waste of——"

"You needn't say it all over again," said Johanna, crossly. "Pansy has said it much more effectively." She swept on to her peroration. "To leave my peaceful existence to take charge of a—of a young monster——"

The general drift of conversation, Pansy thought, seemed to augur favourably but she was most anxious to have the matter settled.

"Are you taking charge of me, aunt?" She added: "Dear."

"I," said Johanna, "who never liked films anyway. I who——"

"This," said Mr. Horton, enthusiastically, "this will be different. The treatment, the theme. I can't describe it. A juvenile *Crime and Punishment*, perhaps—with a diminishment of scale, of course, and yet phychologically equivalent——"

Pansy stood up. No attention was being paid to her at all. If the matter was settled, it was unnecessary to allow the pair to continue talking. Pansy wanted to be in bed. She said, loudly: "Is aunt taking me to London?"

"A Dostoevskian insistence on spiritual values and yet without the——"

Pansy pinched him.

"Good Christ!" said Mr. Horton, and immediately

apologised profusely. "But that child makes a *habit* of pinching."

"No doubt," said Johanna.

They both regarded Pansy coldly. She seized her advantage.

"Is aunt taking me?"

Mr. Horton was still peevish at the abrupt check to his dissertation. He snapped at her.

"Haven't we told you so already?"

"No," said Pansy, "you didn't." Plaintively, she said, "I'm very tired."

She swayed convincingly.

"Good God!" said Mr. Horton, "the child is almost asleep on her feet."

Johanna looked at the clock. Thoughtfully, she said: "I imagine one of her main assets is her capacity for making perfectly kindly people feel brutal. Men only, of course." Suddenly she began to push them energetically towards the door. "Take her away! I'll have her with me for years—for ever. Take her away now! Yes, yes! I'll talk to her sister. Yes, all arrangements will be made for the end of next week. If I don't come to my senses. If Matthew——. Yes. All right. All right." She had them out on the street now. "Good-night!" She stood squarely in her doorway. "Good-night!"

Squarely, Pansy faced her on the pavement. She considered kissing, but Johanna's cheek was too high up. Also, Johanna's face didn't look as if it wanted kissing. It was a pity, because Pansy knew kissing was the proper thing in the present situation. However, instead she said, nicely: "Good-night, aunt, and thank you *very* much."

Mr. Horton made a nice little speech, too. With one

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foot on the running-board of the car, he straightened himself dramatically.

"I realise what a big thing you're doing, Miss Hogan, and I want to thank you, sincerely and deeply. When Pansy is older, she will know how much she owes to you. You are making a sacrifice; some day you'll understand how well worth while it all is. You don't know yet, Miss Hogan, exactly what you are giving to the world."

"Indeed I do!" said Johanna and shut the door on them.

X

MESSRS. SAMPSON & WALSH was a long-established Waterford auctioneering firm. It employed three male clerks and five female typists. Three of the typists were plain and efficient; of the remaining two, one was pretty, one very pretty and both slightly less efficient. The plain ones had been engaged by Mr. Sampson, who had long noted the diminishing co-relation between comeliness and competence and who considered that woman was the relaxation of the auctioneer; the pretty ones by Mr. Walsh, who was younger and who liked her all the time.

Miss Watson was the less pretty of the pretty typists but pretty enough for all that. She had round blue eyes, a peroxided frontage to her trimly-set hair and a splendid bosom in a sweater. It was to her that Mr. Walsh, one Friday morning, handed two advertisements to be typed for insertion in the Waterford papers.

“For next Friday’s editions,” he said.

Miss Watson said: “Yes, Mr. Walsh.”

She put the sheets of paper on the table beside her and continued with the letter in her machine. As it happened, she had very little work to do that morning; she had soon finished all but the two advertisements. She frowned at these. Mr. Walsh’s writing was bad. Still absent-mindedly frowning, she wound a curl behind her ear and thought of her boy friend. Miss Watson was a good girl,

an average girl, whose only present interests were boys, clothes, dancing, films and knitting, in that order. She would make a typically good Irish wife and mother. She was not, however, as indicated, a very good employee. She had paid little attention to Mr. Walsh's directions when he had handed her the advertisements; she had been thinking of her promising boy friend then also. In Mr. Walsh himself, she had no interest at all; he was a nice-looking young man but although in England, according to the magazines, typists always married their boss, they never did in Ireland. Except doctors and nurses. Nurses were different, somehow. Miss Watson continued to twist the curl and stare at Mr. Walsh's annoying writing. Though why nurses should be different. . . . Quite low-class, really, some of them. Besides, it made a girl so coarse, there was no denying that. . . .

Mr. Regan, the senior clerk, opened the frosted-glass door and put in his head.

“Anything for the papers? Paddy's waiting.”

“Let him wait!” said Miss Watson, automatically and than she allowed the curl to spring back to its unnatural sleek twist and gave an agitated jab at the advertisements in front of her. “Oh! Oh, I don't know. There are two advertisements here.”

“Well, give them to me, for God's sake! It's half-past twelve.”

“But I haven't typed them yet.”

“It's half-past twelve, I tell you! What you girls do—”

“Yes,” said Miss Watson, who had heard of Mr. Regan's wonderment many times before, “but I'm not sure if they're for today's issues. I thought Mr. Walsh said next Friday. I'll ask him.”

"You can't. He's gone golfing."

"Mr. Sampson might know."

"He's not in today."

"Oh! Maybe you'd know, Mr. Regan. They're for a farm belonging to a man called Carey——" She peered. "I *think* it's Carey."

"Casey," said Mr. Regan, reading over her shoulder, "of Doon. And the other is Monaghan of Doon. No, I don't know anything about them." He raised his voice. "Anyone know about two ads.—Casey and Monaghan?" No one knew. "Are you sure Mr. Walsh said next Friday, Miss Watson?"

"No," Miss Watson admitted, weakly, "I just thought I remembered him saying something like that."

"If you girls would only listen——"

Miss Watson had heard of this wild hope of Mr. Regan's frequently also. She said: "I'd better get them done and send them off with Paddy. Can't do any harm, anyway."

Mr. Regan said, with grim satisfaction: "You'll need to hurry. If they're late, I don't imagine Mr. Walsh will be impressed by the excuse that you *thought* they were for *next* Friday."

Sourly, he realised that Mr. Walsh would still be impressed by the eyes and the hair and the bosom.

"I won't be a minute. They're short. Oh!" Miss Watson wailed, even while she tapped out: To Be Sold By Public Auction On, "his *writing*!"

"It's perfectly legible," said Mr. Regan, who had had nine years' more experience of it than Miss Watson, "but I suppose I'd better read them out to you."

"Oh, it would be such a *help*, Mr. Regan."

"If I didn't," said Mr. Regan, ungraciously, "you'd be late with them. 'By order of the vendor, Mr. James

Casey——' The trouble you girls put everyone to with your——'"

But Miss Watson's hands were poised expectantly over the typewriter keys and he read on in his flat, grumbling voice, with an occasional pause for breath and a glance of distaste at the light-brown rococo poll and the swift, short, red-nailed fingers.

" . . . thirty acres . . . in good heart. . . . On the same day, by order of the vendor, Bridget Monaghan . . . her freehold interest in . . . small, thatched dwelling-house, in good repair . . . ten acres. . . . "

Before one o'clock, Paddy, who had been wearily scraping the blistering brown paint from the skirting near the door with one toe-cap, was prematurely handed these two advertisements to convey, with others, to the advertisement managers' offices. And so, on that Friday in October, the day before the Monaghans were, as they hoped, quietly and secretly to leave Doon, the notices of the forthcoming sales of Jamesy Casey's farm and Bridget Monaghan's cottage appeared nestling cheek to cheek on the printed page and a week too soon.

The Waterford papers were brought to Matthew Hogan's shop at six o'clock by the Waterford-Cork bus. By quarter-past six that evening there was wild surmise and wilder talk in Kilmuc. In Ballybay, where the papers came to the post office by the bread van at ten-past six, there was equal talk and surmise at half-past six. And by seven o'clock, carried from both sides by homeward bicycle or cart or feet into Doon itself, the news and the talk and the surmise had spread like a fever all over that countryside.

Bridget Monaghan was sitting, dreamily humming,

by the fire with Pius on her lap when Mary came in. Mary was white and shaking. She carried a copy of the *Munster Express*. She said: "Look, mother!"

Her mother looked up, pleased.

"Oh, the paper, dear! How nice to get it so early!"

"Delia Cunningham gave it to me now at the gate. She asked me——" Mary bent over her mother with the paper held in her trembling hand. "Look, mother!"

"Well, I can't now, dear, not with Pius in the way. But thank you, all the same."

"I don't want you to read it. I mean, I do want you to—I want you to read *this*."

Amiably, Bridget Monaghan leaned sideways.

"Yes, dear?" She glanced where Mary's finger indicated. "Oh, yes, of course. It looks quite nice, doesn't it? 'Dwelling-house, in good condition'." She looked around with an air of satisfaction. "So it is, too, really—nothing that a touch of paint wouldn't make perfect. I do think it's nice to be able to be truthful even when you're selling something."

Mary's finger-nail scored the paper heavily.

"But, mother, look!"

"Well, of course, it mightn't be exactly in good heart, as it says there, but I'm sure it has the makings of a nice little farm all the same."

Mary stood upright.

"Did you know Jamesy was selling his farm?"

Bridget Monaghan frowned slightly.

"I do think Jamesy said the advertisements weren't to be in until next week. Yes, he must have said that. Because now, of course, we can't slip away quietly as we meant to do. People will talk." She brightened. "But,

after all, they won't have much time to talk between now and tomorrow morning."

Mary said: "They're talking. Delia Cunningham was talking." She said, in a queer strained voice: "Mother, why is Jamesy Casey selling his farm?"

Bridget Monaghan sighed.

"Oh, dear me! I'm sure you'll be annoyed. He wouldn't let me tell you and I said you'd be annoyed." Absent-mindedly, she tickled Pius under the chin. "Well, he's coming with us, you see, dear."

Mary stared at her. She let the paper slip to the floor. It rustled and spread out at her feet. At last, she said: "I don't understand. How can Jamesy Casey be coming with us?"

"But why can't he, dear? It's a very sensible arrangement. Jamesy explained it all. I don't really think it was sensible to stop me telling you because you are annoyed, just as I knew you'd be, but the rest of it was very sensible."

Again, Mary said, hopelessly: "I don't understand."

Her mother sat up straight and grabbed at the rolling, Pius.

"But I'm *telling* you, dear. He's coming to Kildare with us, so of course he's selling his farm. What would he want with a farm in Doon," she asked, reasonably, "when he'd be living in Kildare?" She jogged Pius on her knee and smiled complacently. "Jamesy says we'll be very comfortably off, with what he'll get for his farm here and my own bit from this place added to our nice new home." She heaved a small contented sigh. "It will be so lovely, won't it, dear, to start off like that in our new home, all safe and respectable?" She waited for Mary to speak but Mary was still staring at her in that blank,

bewildered fashion. Questioningly, Bridget Monaghan returned the stare and then, with a little exclamation at her own foolishness, she said, rather primly: "I forgot to say we're getting married first, of course, dear, Jamesy and I. Tomorrow morning. In the cathedral in Waterford," she said, proudly, "on our way to Kildare. Jamesy has it all fixed." She nodded at Mary, very fond and pleased. "Now, isn't it a lovely surprise? I'm sure the children will enjoy the wedding."

For a few moments more, Mary continued to stare at her mother and then she began to laugh. It was long, loud laughter. Pius chuckled in sympathy but Bridget Monaghan, after the first discordant peal, had an air of gentle surprise which increased until she said, at last, with a soft suggestion of reproof: "But do you think it's funny, dear?"

Mary gasped.

"It's very funny, mother. They've bought a farm for Jamesy Casey."

Bridget Mohaghan pursed her lips thoughtfully.

"Why, in a way, I suppose they have, dear." In a vaguely proprietary tone, she added: "Jamesy is a very clever man."

(And at that same time, Matthew Hogan's evening meal was churning in his stomach while he thought: "My God! Have I bought a farm for Jamesy Casey?" and William Bates was listening to his wife while she told him that beyond a doubt, fool that he was, he'd bought a farm for Jamesy Casey, and Jim Power, who had neither seen a newspaper nor heard the talk, was cycling home by Doon and telling himself he was glad he wasn't disturbed by sight of that brat who'd be cleared out to hell from here forever tomorrow.)

As abruptly as it had begun, Mary's laughter ceased. She sat down. She leaned her head against the back of the chair. Timidly, her mother stretched out a hand and touched her.

"You're not angry with me, dear, about not telling you sooner?"

"No, mother. I'm not angry."

"You think it's a good idea, don't you, dear?"

Mary closed her eyes. Slowly, her face relaxed from the strained lines of her harsh mirth. She looked at her mother. She said, evenly: "Do you want to marry Jamesy Casey, mother?"

Bridget Monaghan gazed over Pius's tufted cock's-comb into the heart of the fire.

"When I was hearing all about the apple trees and the red tiles on the kitchen floor and the daffodils that would be up in the spring and the small river running between one field and the next I was sometimes thinking wouldn't it be grand to start off right in a place like that. I was thinking it would be nice to be respectable in a place like that."

"I never knew you worried about being—about that, mother."

"I didn't, dear, not here; not after the first time. I suppose I'm used to not being respectable here. It was only when I started thinking of the new place and the new people, I felt I wished I could have myself new, too, to match." Reflectively, she rubbed her chin on Pius's head. "It was mostly the apple trees made me feel that way."

"I understand, mother."

"I knew you'd be glad for me, too. You've never said so to me, dear, but I knew you didn't like me not being

respectable. And of course, I do realise that the really bad thing about it all was that it made everyone belonging to me not respectable, too. You didn't say you were glad yet though, dear."

"I am glad for anything that will make you happy, mother. Will it make you happy to be married to Jamesy Casey?"

"Well, as I explained, dear, it's not so much being married to Jamesy. It's being married."

"I understand that, mother. I mean will you be happy living with Jamesy Casey for the rest of your life?"

"I don't see why not, dear."

"Do you like him, mother?"

"He's quite nice, dear. I used to think," said Bridget Monaghan, still broodingly rubbing her chin on Pius's downy skull, "that men were different but the older I get the more I'm inclined to believe that they're all the same and I think Jamesy will do as well to be married to as another," and with these words, Bridget Monaghan abandoned for ever her wild and perilous dream of love.

Jim Power flung his bicycle into the shed and came wearily over the cobbles of the yard to the kitchen door. Ellen would be waiting for him in the kitchen with a good meal and a bright fire and everything neat and clean and herself neat and clean, too, so neat that not a smile would ever disturb the smooth planes of her face nor an unnecessary word pass her calm, firm lips. He looked at the shut door as he came towards it and dreaded opening it and going in to all that was waiting for him, a dread that was in every homecoming, like the dread that was in the waking to every day and the living of it,

a dread that had become as automatic and unconscious a part of his being as breathing.

But tonight the door was not left for him to open. Before he was half-way across the yard, it was flung open and he saw Ellen standing here, peering into the dusk, outlined by the light within. She called him urgently and he quickened his pace and then she had his arms gripped tightly and was saying to him through clenched teeth: "Are you going to let him go? Are you going to let him go?"

Her eyes were distended; her fingers were digging into his arms. She dragged him inside and slammed the door shut and turned on him.

"Are you going to let Toughy go?"

"Toughy?"

The name was in his mind all day but to hear her speak it was meaningless. He stood, stupid as the most stupid of his farm animals, staring at her. She pulled him by the sleeve over to the table where the *Waterford Star* lay open and pointed to it.

"Yes! Toughy! Look! It's here. Hasn't anyone told you? Everyone knows. Everyone's talking about it. Look! Jamesy Casey's place—and the Monaghan place. They say he's marrying that woman—they say they're going away tomorrow."

He said, heavily: "I knew the Monaghans were going away tomorrow."

"You did! You were letting Toughy go away! You were letting that man take Toughy away!"

"I don't know anything about Jamesy Casey."

"You were letting Jamesy Casey take Toughy away! What kind of a brute are you to go handing your own son over to another man? I suppose you don't mind what

happens to Toughy? No, you'd be more careful of one of your yearlings, wouldn't you, than of your own child? All you want is not to have him around. You want to pretend he doesn't exist."

"In the name of God, Ellen," said her husband, dazedly, "will you take hold of yourself and tell me what you're trying to say!"

"You understand well enough what I'm saying! I'm talking about your son. Your son, do you hear?"

"Whatever I've done about—whatever I've done in this matter, I've done for the best. Whatever I've done, I've done for you, Ellen. That's God's truth."

"For me!" She laughed. "You take everything away from me and then you want to take Toughy, too!"

He caught her by the shoulders and shook her.

"Ellen! Are you gone crazy?"

She wrenched herself away from him. She faced him as if she were about to strike him but then she turned from him, sat down in a chair by the table, laid her head on the *Waterford Star* and began to cry.

"Toughy comes here often. Well, why shouldn't he come here? Who has a better right to come here than he has? He helps me and he comes in and out by the windows and he's not afraid of anything. He even saves me from the turkey cock. He's very proud when he has to save me from the turkey cock." She lifted her wet face and glared at him. "Well, he has a perfect right to come here, hasn't he?"

Her hair was tossed and tumbled around her face; her cheeks were flushed and tear-streaked; her mouth was trembling. Jim Power closed his eyes for a moment and shivered. He reached out a hand, hesitated, and then put it on her hand.

"Ellen! Ellen, how could I know?"

"No, you couldn't know. We were very clever. We had to be very clever because you were the cross man with the bull. And I was the one who was ashamed to be seen with Toughy. You and I, you see, just thinking about our pride and nobody thinking about Toughy at all. Toughy stalking around and thinking how great he was and never guessing that everyone was ashamed of him." She laughed harshly. "Imagine anyone being ashamed of Toughy!"

He took her hand and held it very tightly between his two hands. She looked at him while the big, slow tears trickled down her face and pattered on the damp newspaper.

"And now he won't be coming any more!"

"Ellen, love! Ellen, what can I do? I thought if they were gone away, maybe there'd be a chance for us again. I thought there might be a chance for us then, sometime, love. I thought it was the only last chance."

She jumped up. "Selfish! That's what's wrong with both of us! Selfish! A chance for us—but never a chance for Toughy!" She stamped her foot. "I want Toughy! Go and get Toughy! This is where he should be. Get the car and bring Toughy back!"

"Ellen!"

"Stop saying Ellen! Hurry up!"

"But, Ellen—Oh, God help me, I'm all bewildered. What do you want me to do?"

She said, with a dangerous, calm distinctness: "Go and bring Toughy here at once! You're his father and this is his home."

"Do you mean—to live here? Always?"

"Oh," she said, sobbing and raging, "of course. Bring

Toughy home!" Suddenly she caught her breath and glanced at him doubtfully. "You met Toughy. You do—want him?"

He took a step towards her.

"I want you."

She warded him off with that doubtful, appealing expression.

"But—him?"

His patience broke. He caught her and held her tightly.

"Christ, yes!" he said. "You first, but him, too," and he bent his head and kissed her salty lips.

Mary and her mother were talking quietly by the fire when Jamesy Casey and Tommy came in together. There was a queer furtive grin flickering around Jamesy's pointed face; Tommy's face was solemn as ever. Jamesy sidled into the room with that protruding shoulder thrust forward. He paused inside the doorway. He gave a calculating glance at Mary. He said: "Seems there's been a bit of a slip-up. I suppose you've heard about it?"

Mary said: "Yes."

"Too late to do any harm now, though." He came farther into the room. "Been having a little chat with your mother, eh?"

"Yes."

"That's right. Everything settled up sensibly now, eh?"

"Everything's settled up."

"That's right. Tommy and I have been having a bit of a chat, too. Haven't we, Tommy?"

Tommy said: "Yes." His face broke suddenly into a broad grin and then was serious as before.

"I was explaining to Tommy, you see, Mary, that we'll

have to get him fixed up proper in the book now. After tomorrow his name will be Casey and he'll be fixed up proper in the book like everybody else. Father: James Casey. Mother: Bridget Casey, formerly Monaghan. I saw the way it goes in the book."

"Sit down, Jamesy!" Bridget Monaghan said.

"Thank you, Bridget. I *will* take the weight off my feet." He sat. "Tommy Casey! You'll do what I tell you then, me lad, or know for what!"

"Ach, I might."

"We'll have to get busy right away. There'll be a lot to do on our new place, Tommy, even more than on our old place for a start." His small eyes kept darting sideways to Mary while he spoke to Tommy. Her eyes were fixed on her brother. "And you needn't think I'll let you try out all those new-fangled notions of yours, either!"

"Aureomycin for pigs," said Tommy. He said it firmly and flatly as if he had been saying it for days, as indeed he had.

"And Epsom salts for the cat!"

"We'll try it on one pig first, of course."

"Well, mebbe one pig." All the time he watched Mary. "Ah, there's a deal of hard work before us, all right, but there's the makings of a fine place there."

"We'll manage," said Tommy, and Mary smiled at her brother with complete understanding and love and, with a sigh of relief, Jamesy relaxed back comfortably in his chair.

"Ah," he said, nodding to the fire, "there's advantages and disadvantages in all arrangements of this sort—in all matrimonial arrangements, you might say—but I imagine we'll all shake down very comfortably together."

Mary looked at him steadily.

“Do you really think we will?”

He returned her look as steadily.

“It’s worth trying—for me, anyway. There are advantages and disadvantages, I said. For me, too.”

“Yes. There’s one big advantage for you.”

“There is.”

“The new farm.”

“You always had a bitter tongue for me, Mary, though I’m not denying the truth of what you say. But there’s a bigger advantage for me than the farm itself, though you might find it hard to believe it.”

She said, more gently: “I do believe it.”

“Do you, faith! I can hardly believe it myself. I tell you what, Mary, I get surprised at myself lately sometimes.”

“I hope you keep on getting surprised at yourself.”

“I might, then. There’s no fool like an old fool.”

“No one could call you old, Jamesy,” said his betrothed, kindly.

“Thank you, Bridget. Well, now that Mary has given us her blessing, I suppose it’s all plain sailing for to-morrow.”

Mary flushed at the implied sneer. But, seeing Tommy watching his father with solid satisfaction, she said, with no trace of annoyance: “I hope everything will turn out very well for my mother and Tommy. And you. I think there’s a good chance everything will turn out well. You see, you’ll be starting without the—the disadvantages you had expected. Or, at least, with only Pius. None of the rest of us will be going to Kildare.”

Jamesy looked genuinely surprised.

“My mother has told you Pansy was going to London.

I'm bringing her to Johanna Hogan tonight. Miss Kelly wanted to keep the twins; mother and I have decided that it's better now that she should. And Toughy's father came for him an hour ago."

Jamesy slapped his thigh and gave a great laugh.

"Jim Power! Well by God, people do the queerest things!"

Bridget Monaghan said, tearfully: "I didn't want to let him go but Mary said it' would be better for him. They're going to adopt him." She cast a reproachful glance at Mary. "But I didn't want to let him go." Indignantly, she added: "That man insisted on whipping Toughy off right away, too. He'd hardly give us time to wash him properly."

Jamesy gave another snorty laugh.

"Jim Power!" He steadied himself. "Don't you worry, Bridget, Toughy will be all right. Ach, I wouldn't have beaten Toughy—but it'll be more natural for him to be where he is."

Still tearful, Bridget Monaghan said: "Mary's not coming with us either."

Jamesy uttered a strangled grunt. His pointed nose twitched above his twitching upper lip. Then once more, he steadied himself.

"And I don't know," her mother wailed, "how I'm going to manage without her!"

Jamesy regarded her curiously. Then he said and there was no sneer in his voice this time: "I tell you what, Bridget, when you haven't Mary to manage for you, you might find out that you're able to manage for yourself," and turned challengingly to Mary.

Again she flushed but again she answered him evenly.

"You may be right. I'm sorry to leave mother but I think it's better for everybody that I should. You and I were never meant to live in the same house."

"Well, now, Mary, I'd be the last to say a word against you but I think you have 'something there.'"

"They're all going," Bridget Monaghan said, brokenly. "I thought they'd all enjoy the wedding so much and now they won't be there." Very crossly she said to Mary: "Maybe it *is* all for the best, as you say, but you've ruined my day tomorrow."

"*I'll* be there," said Jamesy.

But even this consolation appeared insufficient.

"All my family," said Bridget Monaghan and her voice rose to a Celtic keen, "scattered to the four corners of the earth!"

"Ah, now," said Jamesy, "there'll be a nice little family left. Yourself and myself and Tommy. And Pius, of course," he added hastily, as Bridget Monaghan's woebegone eyes swivelled slowly around to the open door of the inner room where the youngest Monaghan slept. His darting glance caught the worried flicker that crossed Mary's forehead. "Ach," he said, "I won't beat Pius either." He leant forward and tapped Bridget Monaghan's knee with one demonstrating forefinger. "And if it's the smallness of your family that's troubling you, Bridget, why, if no one can call me old, no one can call you old either, and there's plenty of time to remedy that!"

"I can have the twins!" said Miss Kelly. She looked at Mary and Pansy and repeated: "I can have the twins!" Suddenly, she turned to the fire, burning under a singing kettle in her little kitchen and her hands waved agitatedly

over it. "Tea! Yes, you must have tea. Yes, tea. I can have the twins."

Mary said: "I must leave Pansy at Johanna Hogan's and then I'm going back to Darmody's tonight. I felt I couldn't—" She choked. "In the morning, saying goodbye, and people staring. . . I couldn't do it."

Miss Kelly recalled herself from the exquisite contemplation of a twin-filled future and saw Mary's white, bewildered face. Her hands ceased their vague flutterings. She smiled.

"If you feel that you would look foolish in the morning standing there and waving your mother and Jamesy Casey off together, well, why on earth, child, *should* you stand there and look foolish?" Severely, she added: "You've been carrying your family on your shoulders and now they've slipped off and you don't know what to do with yourself." She regarded Mary angrily. "I hate unselfishness. Living by proxy, that's what it is."

Pansy said: "I hate unselfishness, too."

"I'd noticed that," said Miss Kelly. "Live!" she said to Mary. You have your whole life before you. You're healthy and young and pretty—"

"Oh!" Pansy asked, interestedly, "would you call Mary *pretty*?"

Mary laughed. It was a young laugh and Miss Kelly laughed to hear it. Pansy watched them laughing together. She saw no reason for mirth. She was bored. However, she was prepared to be bored until she should arrive in London. In a mild fashion, Pansy liked her family and she was sorry that they were all going to have such horrible lives. She had had a horrible life, too, of course, for a long time, but she had known always that it would change. With a swift pang of sympathy, eased

by the soothing contrast of her own future, she realised that the unknowing twins might be going to have the most horrible life of all.

She said, awed by the dreadful thought: "When the twins come here on holiday, will they have to do lessons with you?"

"Holidays. . . ." Miss Kelly floated away like a bobbing cork on the swelling tide of her visions. "I think the twins are old enough to appreciate a week or two of city life now and again. Good music, painting, drama. I believe if children are shown the best they will learn to love it." (Miss Kelly, afforded no opportunity of disproof in unsophisticated Doon, still clung fondly to this illusion.) "One must not limit the horizons of growing minds."

"You didn't say yet about doing lessons all the time or not," Pansy reminded her, still kindly concerned about the fate of her unfortunate brother and sister.

Dreamily, Miss Kelly looked right through her.

"I believe there is no limit to what my twins can achieve."

Mary said, gently: "I think they'll be very happy. They're very fond of you."

"It's rather extraordinary but I do think they are. Dear me!" said Miss Kelly, worriedly, "I hope I live a long, long time for I *do* want to see how my twins turn out."

Johanna said, starkly: "I haven't broken the news to Matthew yet."

Mary and Pansy stared at her. Pansy's eyes became enormous with rage and horror.

"You haven't told him you're taking me to London?"

“No.”

“But Mr. Horton will be back for us on Wednesday.”

“I know.”

“If you don’t take me, I’ll throw myself in the river. I’ll come floating up to your feet all dead and white.”

“I don’t see how you’d manage to float up the road to me, child, but I’m taking you all right. Come in!” said Johanna and shut the street door behind them. She leaned against it. “One reason I haven’t told him is that the less time I give him to talk at me, the better. I had intended to tell him tonight just before going to bed. When he’s sleepy. Matthew gets very sleepy at bed-time. The other reason is that I’m a coward. Not about anything else; only about Matthew. The way all women are about men.” She put her head on one side reflectively. “I don’t know why it is. It’s not that we particularly *like* men. Maybe it’s because Irishmen are so sure that God created Irishwomen not really for sex reasons at all but specially to look after them. And then they say to themselves that women love it—like the fox, you know.” She straightened her shoulders. “Well, I’ve got to shatter an illusion,” she said and stalked before them into the kitchen.

Matthew was sitting there in peaceful ignorance. As the three walked in to him, he gazed aghast at Pansy, cast a look of reproachful astonishment at Johanna and half-rose from his chair, gripping its arms.

Johanna gave him no further time for astonishment. She stood in the centre of the floor and said what she had to say, clearly and succinctly. There was silence when she concluded. Matthew was sunk again in his chair; Johanna was tense but calm. Pansy was completely happy; she was the glorious cause and centre of this

scene of human interest and she was absorbed in studying the reactions. She waited for Matthew to speak; she considered it was his turn to do so, but he was so dilatory about it that she decided to speak herself.

“It will be a wrench,” she said, in a slow, sad voice.

Matthew stirred. Inadvertently, he glanced at the small hateful figure seasonably dressed in red coat and cap, with red socks to match. The hateful doll was there, too, completely naked and disgusting as a plucked chicken. (Jennifer’s Irish clothes were being kept fresh for London.) He winced. He closed his eyes. Wearily, he opened them again. He steadied himself. He stood up. He drew himself to his full height. He looked down on his foolish sister.

“Are you mad, Johanna?”

Johanna said, briskly: “No, Matthew.” Neatly and quickly, she unhooked a coat from the back of the door. “I must go with Mary to Darmody’s.” She gave a tug at Mary’s sleeve. “You’ll keep an eye on Pansy until I get back.”

“I keep an eye on—I keep——”

“Pansy will be staying here until we go on Wednesday, of course.”

“Do you dare to propose to inflict this—this—Words fail me,” said Matthew and indeed, for once, they did.

“*Alea est jacta,*” said Johanna, very meanly and tugged Mary away.

In an awful silence, Pansy’s and Matthew’s eyes met. Then Matthew drew a hand across his forehead, a trifle histrionically even at this crisis of pure anguish, and began to walk. He walked all over the ground floor of his house and he kept on walking. His neck was rigid; he stared

straight ahead; whenever he passed by Pansy, the stare became more fixed and he saw her less than he saw anything else. When Pansy realised that this exercise had neither direction nor purpose, she squirmed a little uneasily in her chair. She supposed her father wouldn't murder her, but she supposed that only because people usually didn't murder people. When, for the eighth time, he went by her like an iron scarecrow, she remembered that people sometimes did murder people. They must, or there wouldn't be any murders. She drew a deep breath.

"It's a cold night," she said, chattily and shakily.

Matthew took no notice whatsoever but pressed on. Pansy drew another deep breath. Carefully she laid Jennifer on the floor. On his return journey, Matthew stepped upon Jennifer, stumbled, looked down, cursed, and kicked Jennifer to the corner of the room. With a wail of sorrow, Pansy sprang from her chair, rushed to Jennifer and fell on her knees beside the sacrificed doll.

"Oh, my doll! My doll!"

Matthew halted viciously in his insensate wandering.

"Serves you right if it's broken!"

Pansy prodded the yielding Jennifer.

"She's not broken. She can't break. But I'm sure she's hurt."

"If you're so concerned about your doll, you might keep it off the floor."

"I was thinking." Carefully, Pansy gathered up Jennifer and held her to her breast. "I was thinking and I let her slip from my lap." Matthew moved off again but now Pansy and Jennifer moved with him. Together from the kitchen by way of the shuttered shop, the narrow hallway, the sitting-room, the pantry, they returned to

the kitchen. In the shop, Pansy told him: "Jennifer is my mascot." In the hall, she said: "My acting mascot." In the sitting-room, edging after him between a small table, where a red glass flower-vase was precariously balanced, and the sideboard, she explained that having an acting mascot was quite a usual thing for acting people. In the pantry, where all three were tightly wedged in the small space, she said: "No one else in my family wants to act, only me." Back again in the kitchen, she said: "I must have got it from you."

Solitary perambulation has a certain grandeur to soothe a troubled spirit but the addition of a child and a doll makes it ludicrous. It has a distinctly paternal connotation. Matthew did not feel paternal. He felt physically upset and mentally slightly deranged. He felt desperate. He dropped into his chair and uttered a hollow groan.

Pansy interpreted the groan conversationally.

"People keep saying I must have got it from you—I mean, you being famous making me want to be famous, too."

Pansy remembered that this line had succeeded well with Maybella. Apparently it was universally successful. Matthew's haggard face evinced a faint interest. Pansy sighed. She was working hard on her father because she had to live with him until Wednesday and Wednesday was a long way from Friday.

Matthew gave a hollow laugh.

"Who told you I was famous?"

"People."

"Famous in what way?"

"Sometimes," Pansy said, meekly, "I'm not old enough to understand exactly what people are saying. But I often heard them talking about you being famous."

She improvised brilliantly. "Mr. Horton wondered how I could act and then they told him about you and he said yes, of course, and he said it was easy to see now, and he said in the future when they'd be writing about me being famous—in the newspapers and magazines, you know—they'd be writing abou' you, too, because you were my—" She hesitated. "—father," she said, boldly and caught her breath, but evidently no damage was done, for Matthew was obviously interested now and listening intently. She gave him a sweet smile while she studied him coldly. She doubted very much if he were her father at all. When a man lived in a house you knew that he was the father of the children in that house, but if he didn't, how could anyone know? Mammy—mamma—often made mistakes and forgot things; probably she'd made a mistake here, also. More and more, Pansy was coming to believe that she was a foundling. Probably mamma had lost the priceless locket that was around her neck when she was a baby. Meanwhile, she had to live with this man until Wednesday. She smiled at him again. She despised him; he was old and his clothes were shabby and his shop was small and he was going to be left all alone and it was funny now to think how pleased she'd been at the miserable amount of money she'd got from him. "I think you *look* famous," she said. "Very famous."

Matthew was gazing away into the distance. He sighed heavily.

"A mute, inglorious Milton!"

"What?"

"Nothing, child. Ah, *tulit alter honores!*"

He was looking at her now, but quite kindly. Pansy relaxed. She opened her eyes widely and trustfully at him.

"Did you ever act? You look as if you could. I mean, if you wanted to."

Matthew's expression became almost benign.

"It's odd you should ask me that. I did, child, but it's a long time ago." Once more, he gazed wistfully beyond her. "We had an amateur company in Kilmuc. We called ourselves the Buccaneers. Our dramatic standard was not very high, I'm afraid. 'The Croppy Boy', 'The Colleen Bawn', I remember amongst others. I pleaded for better plays but I was told the audience wouldn't appreciate them. A mistake. I do not believe in pandering to the inferior taste of the masses."

"Yes," said Pansy.

"I believe in raising that standard. We needs must love the highest when we see it," said Matthew, firmly, echoing Miss Kelly's ill-founded conviction.

"Yes," said Pansy.

"However, such as our productions were, I played my part in them. Generally," said Matthew, with a deprecating laugh, "the leading part."

"Yes," said Pansy.

"People were kind enough to tell me I had a certain talent. Needless to say, such banal productions offered little scope but I remember in 'The Widower's Revenge'—I was the widower——"

"Yes," said Pansy. She settled herself sleepily and comfortably in her chair. "Tell me more!"

"When you left this evening," said Johanna, "Florrie sat down and cried. Then she disappeared. When she was seen again, she was still crying. More loudly. Alcoholically."

Mary said: "Oh, dear!" She broke into a faster walk.

"No need to run," said Johanna, breathlessly, behind her. "The harm's done now."

Mary said, miserably: "But what could I do? I couldn't help it. I didn't *want* to leave them."

"People," said Johanna, cryptically, "never do what they should do, even when it's staring them in the face," and she spoke no more until they reached Darmody's.

It was after ten o'clock now and the bar was closed. Paul opened the side door to them. He held the handle and looked at Mary and Mary looked at him. Johanna looked at them both. Then the wavering figure of Florrie came tottering towards them in the dim light down the narrow passage. She rested her chin on Paul's shoulder and stared out with unfocussed eyes and then she screamed and pushed Paul aside and caught Mary's hands and pulled her in..

"Mary's back, Paul! She's back!"

"Yes," said Mary.

Florrie dragged her down the passage and into the sitting-room. The others followed silently. She held Mary there under the light, patting and poking her as if to make sure she was real.

"She's back, Paul! You've come back to stay, haven't you, Mary?"

"Yes, Miss Darmody."

"Ah, you shouldn't have gone off suddenly like that. That wasn't a nice thing to do. Ah, no!" Florrie shook her head gravely. "That wasn't a nice thing to do at all."

"I'm sorry, Miss Darmody."

"It's no use being sorry afterwards, Mary. You're young, of course, and therefore heedless, but it was a dangerous thing to do. Most dangerous. There is a certain amount of shock in these cases. Now I don't

wish you to reproach yourself too much—no good expecting an old head,” said Florrie, nodding her own so vigorously that it seemed as if the wild, bright hair might be rent from the grey roots, “on young shoulders—but it may help to make you more careful in future when I tell you that Paul was exceedingly shocked. Warm blankets, hot water bottle, and tea if no abdominal wound, but he would have nothing. He may have recovered but one can’t be sure.”

Helplessly, Mary said again: “I’m sorry.”

“And all day I had been very worried over a certain matter and when I wanted to discuss it with you——” Florrie paused dramatically “—you went.” She was holding on to Mary as if to prevent any possible further escape. “Not that I thought you would be any real help to me, of course, but I find it always clears the air to talk things out. Especially things concerning the Next World.”

Paul suggested, gently: “Mary looks tired, Florrie. Wouldn’t it be a good idea if we all had some tea now—or coffee?”

Florrie turned to him with an expression of offended dignity but she did not relax her hold upon Mary.

“It’s extraordinary, Paul, that whenever I want to discuss the Next World, you want me to drink coffee. There is some subconscious connection there, no doubt, but I cannot fathom it. As for Mary,” said Florrie, callously, “well might she look tired, dashing up and down from Kildare!”

“She wasn’t in Kildare,” said Johanna. “She won’t be going to Kildare,” and sat down and explained.

“H’m!” Florrie relaxed her hold slightly. “That seems satisfactory.” She frowned at Mary. “Fairly

satisfactory. At the moment. But it doesn't remedy the fact that you weren't here this evening, child, when I wanted to talk to you about God. Yes. Now, what did I want to tell you about Him?" Florrie pressed a finger to her lower lip. "Oh, yes, of course. About the way He makes things that get messed up and then goes and blames everybody else. So like a man!" said Florrie indignantly. Her pale eyes wavered. "I thought it out and . . ." She glanced uncertainly about the room. "I thought it out . . ." Her arms fell to her sides. "Oh, Mary," she said, in a broken whimpering voice, "if you could have brought me to see a view or nice, clear running water as you said you always would, but you were gone and I had to take medicine and I was so good and now everything's begun again!"

Paul came over to her.

"It hasn't, Florrie. Everything's all right. Mary is here, and you can be good again."

Very crossly Florrie turned on him.

"Everything's *not* all right, Paul. Now that Mary has started this going away business, how do we know she won't make a habit of it? She is a thoroughly thoughtless, selfish girl. Medicine, of course—but I sometimes wonder was it wise to prescribe the Demon Rum, I mean the Demon Whisky." Brightly she addressed Johanna. "But one must follow doctor's orders, mustn't one?"

Johanna grunted. Florrie nodded and smiled.

"As you say, Johanna. Even when disagreeable. But I do think it would be *better* if Mary didn't keep going away and making me follow disagreeable orders."

"It would be better," said Johanna.

"And she *might* go away?"

"She *might*," said Johanna, grimly.

Quickly, Mary said: "I won't go, Miss Darmody," but Florrie merely sneered.

"The word of a selfish, thoughtless girl is worth nothing. Not that much," said Florrie, snapping her fingers. She surveyed Mary consideringly. "We could keep you locked up, I suppose, but—oh! you'd get out! Sooner or later, you'd creep and crawl away. Like a snake. In the grass. I *hate* snakes," she said, hissing like one herself. Suddenly she stood still. Her eyes widened. She breathed deeply. "I've got it!" she said, triumphantly. "Just like that—" She clapped her hands. "—it came to me! An inspiration—the kind I get about the Next World only this time it's about This World." She turned to Johanna. "If Paul married her, she couldn't go away, Johanna, could she?"

"She could not," said Johanna.

Paul and Mary spoke simultaneously but Johanna's voice sounded clear and distinct above their incoherence.

"I consider," said Johanna and crossed her short legs at the ankles, put her finger-tips together and leaned forward to regard her audience impassively, "that that is a most sensible suggestion, Florrie."

Florrie beamed.

"Like that it came to me." She clapped her hands. "Like that!" She clapped again. "Like—"

"It doesn't matter how it came to you, Florrie. The important thing is that it came." Imperturbably, she regarded Paul and Mary. "As it came to me a long while ago."

Paul began angrily: "Florrie is not responsible for what she says tonight, Johanna, but it is most unfair to Mary that *you* should—"

"I have no intention of being unfair to Mary, Paul.

And if she's embarrassed—as, indeed, she seems to be blushing and practically crying, I notice—at this public match-making, it's your fault for not having done your own match-making in private before now.. And if I know you, you'd never have done it. And if the pair of you don't want to marry," said Johanna, severely, "why did you gawm and gawk at each other at the hall door just now? And if you do want to marry, for God's sake hurry up and say so, because I want to get home to Matthew!"

Paul was very white. He moved towards the door.

"I'm sorry, Mary, that you should be subjected to this annoyance. I know you are too sensible to let it worry you later, or make any difference to the pleasant relationship between you and Florrie and myself." He stopped beside Johanna. "I realise you consider yourself a character, Johanna, and as such entitled to a certain licence of tongue, but you have exceeded even your own bounds tonight," he said, with a cold level rage, and moved on.

But Florrie had moved before him and had flung herself against the door in a dramatic attitude of crucifixion, with one hand gripping the handle tightly.

"Paul!" Her frizzled locks sprayed out against the white door like a mad sun. She moved her head from side to side and rolled her weak eyes pleadingly. "Couldn't you marry her even for *my* sake?"

Johanna regarded him coolly.

"You'd better let him go, Florrie! Maybe I made a mistake. Maybe he doesn't want to marry the girl after all."

"God damn you!" Paul twisted around. "I want to marry Mary more than anything else in the world.

WE ARE SEVEN

I've wanted it for a long time. There's for you, Johanna, if it's any satisfaction to you! But I never intended to ask her to marry me, and I don't intend to ask her now."

"Indeed, Paul! Why not?"

"Because I'm too old," said Paul, bitterly and appeared as if he would drag Florrie from his way, but Florrie pressed harder against the door and rolled her head more frantically and in that moment of his hesitation, Johanna spoke again.

"And do you want to marry him, child?" Silent and trembling, Mary still stood where Florrie had placed her. "Why, yes, I see you do! Anyone can see you do. Really, child," said Johanna, reprovingly, "you must learn to conceal your emotions! Well, child, speak up! What's wrong with *you*? Oh, I remember," said Johanna, admiring her own ankles, "you're illegitimate. Paul is too old and you're illegitimate. What a pity!"

But Paul and Mary were looking at each other now and at no one else. Paul said: "Mary!" Mary's trembling ceased. She said, distinctly, levelly: "I don't even know who my father is."

"Oh, Mary," said poor Florrie, "I know who mine was but what good did it ever do me?"

Johanna stood up.

"I feel I could do with a little refreshment, Florrie, if it wouldn't be troubling you too much."

But still Florrie clung to the door-handle, although Paul had left her and was standing beside Mary.

"Oh, Johanna! Do you think——?" Johanna nodded briefly, authoritatively. Florrie relaxed. She drew a shuddering ecstatic breath. Then she stiffened again. She clapped her hands. "Another idea!" She was

amazed at her own brilliance. "Like that it came to me! Like——"

"Yes, Florrie. We know how it comes."

"Why shouldn't Paul sell this place and start another? In another town. Not drink. Vegetables, maybe, or—yes, vegetables and fruit. All nice and clean. Then if ever I felt upset, I could go and nibble a carrot."

"Another very good idea," said Johanna, "but I wouldn't disturb them now." She drew Florrie after her from the room and closed the door. "I tell you what, Florrie—you and I are very clever. We'll go now and have a drink—not tea or coffee, but a nice large port each and we'll wait until tomorrow to start a new life. We may even," said Johanna, indulgently, "have two nice large ports each, Florrie."

On the following night, Hurley's bar was crowded even beyond the usual confines of a Saturday night. The customers overflowed into kitchen and parlour and were crammed, perforce, into the horrid dark horse-boxes termed snugs. At ten o'clock the shutters were closed as a gesture to convention, but no one considered leaving yet on such a night and from then on the dismissed clients of the few more law-abiding or nervous publicans of the district continued to arrive at this brave haven.

The universal and engrossing topic of conversation was the Monaghans and all and everyone connected with them.

At twelve o'clock the last inrush of eager drinkers and gossipsers squeezed in to Hurley's. By that time, every Monaghan was sleeping.

Bridget Casey had still on her lips the smile with which she had fallen asleep. She had never lain in bed with a man before and to do so, in a decent double bed, had

set the final stamp and seal on her new and indestructible respectability.

Tommy had slept at once. He had meant to think over all that had to be done tomorrow and for the next days and weeks and months but immediately he began to think he found himself dozing off with barely time to reflect that his father and himself would manage fine, anyway.

Mary slept her first dreamless sleep for many a night past. She had no need to dream; reality was more wonderful than any dream and there was no sadness in it for anybody.

The twins' respective dormitories had been left to silence and darkness long since. Each slept sensibly and calmly. Miss Kelly had visited both Willie and Sissy that day. They knew now they were safe for ever. They had no doubt they could achieve whatever, in future, seemed best to her and to them. She would adopt them. If she died, they would inherit her savings and she had told them the amount. They were safe.

It is sad that the cause of their undisturbed repose was also the cause of William Bates's enforced wakefulness. For he was hunched miserably in bed while his wife, sitting up beside him, the blankets dragged over her raised knees leaving a chilly draught to play about William's shrinking form, was telling him, as she had been telling him since they had arrived at the dreaded solitude of their bedroom, as she had been telling him, it seemed to William, forever: "You threw your money away on Jamesy Casey and you still have your beautiful twins!" Four pairs! thought William wildly, but not wildly enough for speech, so he lay and listened and got colder inside and out.

Pansy, asleep, was angelic. She would, indeed, have been shocked to see how old-fashioned and stock a type she appeared in slumber, with a faint flush on her cheeks, her lips slightly parted and her curls tendrilling on the pillow. But, in happy ignorance, she slept on. Beside her lay Jennifer, unchanged and faithful to the last stitch of her battered body, the last painted stare of her smudged eyes.

And in the kitchen below, Matthew was warning Johanna against waking the child. He had reproved her thus several times already until her voice had been subdued to the required whisper, and now she ceased to move about her household tasks and sat down, silent. This suited Matthew. He had plenty to say.

"No doubt, Johanna, there is ability there. Intelligence, too. You observed how she grasped my point regarding the use of under-, rather than over-acting, to emphasise emotion?"

Johanna had observed.

"Possibly I have a certain facility in demonstration but nevertheless her almost intuitive response was unusual in one of such tender years. Malleable clay there. A sensitive spirit. One hopes it will never be flawed by inept or insensitive handling."

Johanna hoped not.

"I could wish to have a hand in the shaping of such promise. Ah, well!" Matthew sighed. "Life ordains otherwise." Momentarily he seemed stricken by the unfairness of life. He rallied nobly. "In any event, Johanna, I shall make it my business to keep, so to speak, an eye on Pansy's progress. I shall pay you both a visit from time to time, for artistic, as well as personal reasons. It is only my plain duty. After all," said Matthew magnificently, "Pansy is my daughter."

Toughy had spent a very busy day on his farm. He had been almost too tired to make the necessary manly grumble when the woman put him to bed. He was a bit disappointed when she washed him first; people washed too much everywhere. Otherwise, the place was all right. Even the man was all right. He had explained about the day he was rude; he had mixed Toughy up with another boy, a boy who threw stones at the chickens. Toughy was annoyed that anyone should think he looked the kind of boy who would throw stones at chickens and, of course, the man understood now that it was a very stupid mistake.

Toughy would like to meet a boy who'd throw stones at his chickens from now on! He'd just like to! Because they were Toughy's chickens now, too. Toughy owned a part of everything, even a part of the bull.

He stirred in his sleep. He flung an arm across the pillow. He had met the chicken boy and the boy was having a horrible time.

Pius slept.

And it was Pius's name that was sounding more often and more loudly than the name of any other Monaghan in Hurley's all these hours and it was Pius's name that was sounding now as the last comers were gathered in to the smokey fume of beer and spirits and the jostling bodies and the talk and the laughter.

"Ah, ye're behind the times altogether! Wait 'till ye hear the whole of it! Go on, Murty! It's Murty's story."

Murty had told his story once for every pint poured down his throat that night and they were many. He was wavering on his feet but he was still standing on them. He nodded appreciatively at the glass pushed over to his elbow, straightened himself, coughed, spat, and

waited. This was his hour and he was making the most of it. He spat again, and began.

"How it was, I happened to be knocking around this morning what time Jamesy Casey and Bridget Monaghan were leaving." By now his narrative had encased itself in familiar settled phrases. "Murphy's car they had to take them to Waterford. Well, the luggage was brought out first. There wasn't much of interest in that, but I'm telling the thing the way it went."

There was a murmur of approbation.

"Then Tommy come out. You couldn't tell by the looks of him if he was glad or sorry at what was going on but I'm afraid he'll know soon enough, God help him, poor lad!"

There was a murmur of sympathy for Tommy.

"Next comes Bridget Monaghan herself. Lookin' the same as ever, as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. Dressed very neat, too, mind ye. There's no denyin' she has the appearance of a good-looking woman yet."

No restraining female influence being present, Murty's last comment evoked some ribald remarks. Murty remained aloof from these trivialities. He took a long swallow from his glass, wiped the froth from his mouth with the back of his hand, and waited for silence.

"Bridget was carryin' the babby, all wrapped up in a shawl and asleep in her arms. Then out comes Jamesy and me lord turns the key in the door and he come over and stands beside Bridget and they waiting to step into the car and he look straight at me with that old foxy impudent grin on him. So there they was, the three of 'em, and I lookin' at 'em.

"At that moment, doesn't the babby wake up! He pulls his arm from the shawl and he rolls his head around

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towards Jamesy. A damn sly grin come over him, such as I never seen on no babby before and only on the one man neither, and all of a sudden 'twas like as if a great white light flashes across me. He jab out his wee fist at Jamesy and he speak what anyone that knows the babby will tell you was the first word he ever utters and I declare to my God that if he speak as true till the day he die he'll harm no living being.

“ ‘Da-da!’ says Pius.”

THE END